

AN ECOLOGY OF WASTE:
TRANSATLANTIC EXCESS IN RENAISSANCE FRANCE

A Dissertation
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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by
Pauline Goul
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Cornell University 2017

This dissertation traces the human relationship to the environment in the French Renaissance through representations of waste in and around the New World. I follow the conceptual shift from a positive abundance to a perception of excess, from travel accounts written by Jacques Cartier and André Thevet, to Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and Montaigne's *Essais*, showing an epistemological break in the ecological relationship. In readings of Thevet's *Singularités de la France Antarctique* and Cartier's *Relations*, I take up the contradictions that arise when both Thevet and Cartier describe very different areas of the New World—Brazil and Canada, respectively—in similar terms of abundance. I argue that both texts have in common a rhetoric of satisfaction and disappointment, setting the stage for the subsequent ambivalence of the notion of abundance. My readings of Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* reveal the process that governs figures of waste, allowing for a coherent environmental reading of the four books. I argue that Rabelais emphasizes the people's reliance on the environment, and advocates for more careful stewarding of natural resources, effectively satirizing the colonial endeavors of the French crown. My reading of Montaigne's "Des Cannibales" uncovers the focus on the moveable elements of the natural world, in a chapter otherwise well known for his critique of colonization. I argue that the text blurs the distinction between human and nonhuman bodies, making any New World settlement unsettling and unsettled. A reading of "Des coches" focuses on the metaphorical nausea provoked by the eponymous coaches, understood as a metaphor for the Europeans' expansionist greed. Montaigne's contrasted views on expenditure constitute an early modern call for a sustainable, moderate consumption. Defining a more philosophical, environmental notion of waste, I identify a common pattern enmeshing human and nonhuman beings in an ecology that is certainly not always balanced, but regulates itself. The ecology of waste, in these French Renaissance texts, also transforms an initial rhetoric of saturation into a poetics of energy and movement: ultimately, waste disorders language, just as it is a locus of disorientation for the human being in her environment.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Pauline Goul holds a double B.A. in English and French literature and a *Maîtrise* from the University of Paris IV-la Sorbonne. Her master's thesis analyzed the poetics of quotation in T.S. Eliot's *Waste land*. She pursued her graduate studies at the department of Romance Studies in Cornell University in 2011. Her scholarship, more generally, tracks the evolution of ecological concepts—including waste, garbage, expenditure, and hoarding—in literature and culture from the Renaissance to the present. She has published articles and chapters in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, *French Ecocriticism*, and *Global Garbage: Early Imaginaries of Excess, Waste, and Abandonment*. She has been appointed as a Visiting Assistant Professor of French and Francophone Studies at Vassar College for the year 2017-2018.

Pour mes parents, Marie-Claire et Christian

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Introduction: Waste Matters

“De vray, ce n’est pas la disette, c’est plustost l’abondance, qui produit l’avarice.”
Michel de Montaigne, (I, 14)ⁱ

“The environment was born at the exact moment when it became a problem.”
Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature*ⁱⁱ

It would have been problematic to write this dissertation in French, for the concept around which it revolves, waste, only exists in this form, with its complex but necessary polysemy, in English. The irony, then, of writing on French sixteenth-century texts in English – a time when, precisely, the French vernacular was developing and rising – is perhaps thus minimized.ⁱⁱⁱ ‘Waste’ is both noun and verb, a double-edge that the English language allows more than French, in which infinitive endings prevent this from happening. We find it written on garbage trucks and dumpsters (waste management, “food waste only”), in idioms (“waste not, want not”), and in more surprising sites. It is, for instance, the name of the English rock band Radiohead’s online store, W.A.S.T.E.. Bassist Colin Greenwood expresses their motivation to create the store in the first email sent through W.A.S.T.E.: “We’re doing this because we want to try and use this amazing communication thingie to matter directly to you and not via any corporate third party bollocks with spinning car ads.”^{iv} Ultimately, the fact that, back in 2008, Radiohead picked this name in order to somehow create a substitute for the regular ways of selling and purchasing music is just one demonstration of the fluidity inherent to the notion of waste: waste implies, but also ironically dismisses, alternatives.

Waste also evades the attempts at successfully translating it into a single word in French. Several words could be subsumed under the concept; and, while all of these words will matter in the study that follows, not a single one of them is a satisfactory rendition of it into French: *déchet* and its synonyms *ordure*, *excrément* or *abjection* come to mind as obvious equivalents in noun form. It is Baudelaire's *fange* and Artaud's *cochonnerie*.^v As for the verb, *gaspiller* would be the most obvious choice, but could also be translated with *dilapider*, *dépenser*, *gâcher*, and *perdre*, to name only a few. In all these forms, waste is bodily, visual, economic, environmental, or linguistic. Insofar as French differentiates notions of waste according to *what* is wasted, it is the multi-faceted notion of the English term 'waste' that allows for a more salient thinking of it to come to light across readings of the bodily waste in François Rabelais's works, the singular abundance in André Thevet and Jacques Cartier's travel narratives in the New World, and expenditure in Michel de Montaigne's New World chapters in the *Essais*.

There would also be a familiarity between waste and disposability, following Ranjana Khanna's conceptualization of it in "Disposability:" "The term *disposable* carries two distinct references to excess, as seen in the different uses of the term: in "disposable camera or disposable diaper," on the one hand, and "disposable income or disposable assets," on the other. The former, the disposable camera or diaper, designates a product created for disposal after (usually one) use, at which point it is treated as excessive or as waste matter. The latter, disposable income or assets, refers to something available for use, in excess of notions such as need, necessity, or requirement. [...] With the connotation of "availability" hanging over that of the "throwaway," a potential tension is introduced with certain kinds of disposable objects, especially when they

happen to be people.” Also: “So there are three strands of thought that emerge from the term *disposable*: the throwaway (object) in production, the available (income) in reproduction, and the sovereign commandment (over life and death and sexual access)”^{vi}

Overall, a great amount of reflection on the concept of waste comes from the fields of psychoanalytical studies or anthropology. I have used both as inspirations, and a way to expand the notion to its conceptual limits. It allows, notably, for a discussion of the relationship between waste and death, in Khanna’s definition, or in Julia Kristeva’s, in *Powers of Horror*.^{vii} Waste is also, then, close to Kristeva’s abjection:

In the presence of signified death – a flat encephalograph, for instance – I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver.^{viii}

In anthropology, one would obviously have to look at Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger*, and what is probably the most cited quotation in all of her work, at least in waste studies talks and conferences I have attended over the years:

If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place. This is a very suggestive approach. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.^{ix}

These analyses allow me to define useful equivalents, in English, to the word ‘waste’:

dirt, the disposable, pollution, the abject, body fluids, defilement, shit. Note that most of the definitions involve some kind of ordering or limit, and symbolism between waste and something else, called system, the norm, life. These are definitions that function only to a certain extent in my conception of a literary and environmental waste, in French

Renaissance texts. *That* waste inverts the questions: what if waste was not so fundamentally disgusting (Rabelais)? What if there was a quality to waste, outside of utilitarian or purifying approaches (Montaigne)?

The task will then be to reconcile excess as it has been previously conceived—that is to say, as a crucial dimension of French Renaissance texts in Terence Cave’s rhetorical *copia*, and in Mikhail Bakhtin’s lower bodily stratum—with what I will argue is an all-encompassing environmental notion of waste that can be traced in Renaissance texts.^x This notion of environmental waste, as an adjective first, will subsume the range of forms waste assumes in the period, namely as bodily, economic, and linguistic excess.

Perhaps the best way to begin to show this is through the etymology of the term ‘waste.’ Curiously, the English ‘waste’ comes directly from the Old French *wast(e)*, a dialect variant of *guast(e)* or *gast(e)*, now *gâter*.^{xi} Further down the etymology, one also finds the Latin *vastus* or, perhaps more accurately, the verb *vastare*.^{xii} This distinction is important for the concept I wish to foreground. *Vastus* evokes the English *vast*, while *vastare* refers to a catastrophic act: “rendre désert, dépeupler; ravager, dévaster, ruiner” [to desert, to depopulate, to ravage, to devastate, to ruin]. The notion of waste I define is as close to the negative movement of ‘devastate’ as to the spatial expansiveness of ‘vast’; throughout this project, this twofold notion of waste is critical. It represents a violent, brutal pillage or conquest of the land, an eradication of its inhabitants, that is to say, the ideal blank slate, a desert. Yet, it is also, opposite the notion of a desert, that of “useless expenditure or consumption, squandering [of money, goods, time, effort, etc.].”^{xiii} It is emptiness and its opposite, the surplus, the excessive accumulation. Necessarily twofold,

it empties out some site in order to fill up another one. It is necessarily an ambivalent, compensatory notion.^{xiv}

Before moving along further, though, it is necessary to define two important concepts I will use throughout: ecology on the one hand, environment on the other. Take, for example, the equivalence between ecocriticism and environmental criticism, and, in particular, in some scholars' marked preference, rather than an indifference, for one or the other. In popular usage, 'ecology' and 'environment' are indeed different. 'Ecology' is defined as "[t]he branch of biology that deals with the relationships between living organisms and their environment" or, more simply, it is defined as the relationships themselves, independently from its usage in the biological sciences.^{xv} It is also, of course, "[t]he study of or concern for the effect of human activity on the environment; advocacy of restrictions on industrial and agricultural development as a political movement; (also) a political movement dedicated to this." The ecology of ecocriticism is closer to the latter definition. I am however more interested in the more general ecology, deviated from the biological science, that names the fact of relationality as such between a range of entities. This is the notion of ecology that I channel in the title of the dissertation, "An Ecology of Waste." 'Environment,' on the other hand, signifies "[t]he action of circumnavigating, encompassing, or surrounding something; the state of being encompassed or surrounded." It is only through the notion of the movement of surrounding that it comes to mean, in the way we now mostly understand it, "[t]he natural world or physical surroundings in general, either as a whole or within a particular geographical area, esp. as affected by human activity." As is visible in its definition, ecology needs the concept of environment

in order to assert its signification. The environment seems to lie flat, while ecology would name the various acts that happen in this still background.

To some extent, ecocriticism, in the two waves identified by Lawrence Buell – who places his first book, *The Environmental Imagination* (1996), in the first wave, and his later one, *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), in the second – first foregrounded environment and later ecology. While Buell still favors the adjective ‘environmental’, the ‘new’ ecocritics, arguably led by Timothy Morton, prioritize “ecology,” foregrounded in the Morton’s titles, *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), *The Ecological Thought* (2010), and *Dark Ecology* (2016).^{xvi} Morton’s call for an ecology without nature is thus also a call for ceasing the separation between, on the one hand, human beings, and, on the other, a nonhuman environment. This call, that is, would eradicate the need for the very concept of environment. The movement of ecocriticism can thus be synthesized, albeit a bit too schematically, as a move away from the ‘mere’ literary study of the environment, governed by the Romantics, Thoreau and Emerson, and the color green, to a more thorough critique of, precisely, the shortcomings of such a limited conception of it. It moves beyond the green, to the ocean, to the polluted areas. It moves from the pastoral to the urban landscapes. It extends its temporality as far back as scientists will allow the Anthropocene to date, and even before.^{xvii} All this leads to a more political approach: a political ecology.^{xviii}

Simultaneously nourished by the critique of these terms and cognizant of their lexical history and importance, I will precisely use both.

In my readings, ‘environment’ will be *the* environment, as in, the nonhuman surroundings of human beings. This is important because the Renaissance is, in my

opinion, the time in which humanism put man at the center. In terms of our timeless perception of the environment, there is a good reason for culture and nature to be perceived separately, even if this is merely the result of a social construct.

‘Environment’—a word that already exists in Brunetto Latini’s *Trésor* in the sixteenth century—thus underscores a need to name whatever it is: the human position of being surrounded, of being at the center, albeit erroneously.^{xix} At the same time, the Renaissance is the moment when human beings also discern natures-cultures instead of two separate entities. They perceive that *the* environment is not only *theirs* but critically *them*.^{xx} The fact, moreover, that sixteenth-century France needed the concept of nature, and constructed that of wilderness and *sauvage* too, is in this way most significant. In studying the fact of relationality in the notion of environment, I study the repositioning and the rerouting of human beings in, on, among and with their environment. I will call this, with Bruno Latour and Sara Ahmed, a moment of disorientation.

Both the French anthropologist and philosopher Bruno Latour and the British-Australian feminist and queer theories scholar Sara Ahmed take up the concepts of, for the former, disorientation, and, for the latter, orientation. It is at the intersection of a political science of ecology, with Latour, and a *Queer Phenomenology*, with Ahmed, that I wish to place my own use of disorientation in the readings of Rabelais, Montaigne, Cartier and Thevet.^{xxi} Latour only recently turned to the notion of disorientation, while Ahmed’s whole theory hinges on the concept of orientation, beyond that of sexual orientation, yet she fundamentally explores what it means to be situated in space and time—a very ecological question. If Latour’s implications are more political, and Ahmed’s more phenomenological, they both express a sense of spatial, or, in my reading,

environmental confusion; a turbulence instead of an inherent stability in the way human beings stand on the earth.

In his lecture given at Cornell University on October 25, 2016, “Is Geo-Logy the umbrella for all the Sciences? Hints for a new University,” Bruno Latour commences his reflection with the concept of disorientation:

“My hunch is that the disorientation everybody feels about the dislocation of politics — even more evident at this time of the presidential election — is the direct consequence of this other disorientation regarding the territory. If politics appears so vacuous, it might be because it has not a solid and shared ground on which to raise issues of substance. How can you expect to have substantial policy debates if there is no territory to map, no cosmos to share, no soil to inhabit? How could we maintain a minimum of decent common institutions if we have no land in common, literally no common ground?”^{xxii}

There are two disorientations referred to in this introduction: first, the disorientation of feeling that he associates with the dislocation of politics, and second, but in his chronology it comes before the former, what he deems “this other disorientation regarding the territory.” The former is a consequence of the latter: in his phrasing, moreover, the former is subjective, a feeling, it concerns the human aspect of the question, while the latter sounds more factual, objective, and happens at the level of the territory. In this way, Latour identifies a territorial disorientation as the cause for the dislocation of politics —affirming a similar image of disruption upon both the environment. The territory, a solid and shared ground, the cosmos, the soil, the land all refer to what I would call the environment. The notion, despite being relatively new in his thought, could come from his concept of a *Nouveau Régime Climatique*, “quand le cadre physique que les Modernes avaient considéré comme assuré, le sol sur lequel leur histoire s’était toujours déroulée est devenu instable. Comme si le décor était monté sur scène

pour partager l'intrigue avec les acteurs."^{xxiii} More importantly, a few lines below, he associates the present disorientation to that of the discovery of a new land in the past: "This time it is not a novel continent in addition to the land we used to inhabit — as was the case at the time of the European land grab — but the same land whose behavior has become unrecognizable." It is to this extent that the relation traced by Latour synthesizes the way I read the excess as 'transatlantic' in this project. The exact meaning of the territorial disorientation is merely hinted at: it is the ground suddenly unstable, it is the epistemological break of a "novel continent," it is the impossibility to find common ground, but also, ultimately, a land "whose behavior has become unrecognizable." In my interpretation, Latour names disorientation the moment in which a relationship with a land becomes complicated or somehow ruptured.

Latour's disorientation is the negative of orientation, which, in the common acceptance, signifies "the relative position or direction of something."^{xxiv} Sara Ahmed, in *Queer Phenomenology*, emphasizes precisely, in my interpretation, the feeling of being relative, or related, to things: "Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitation, as well as "who" or "what" we direct our energy and attention toward."^{xxv} She uses the term in the plural, coming at it from the perspective of queer theory, that is to say, from the concept of sexual orientation, but expanding it, in my view, to an environmental notion: how we inhabit space. Whether in its positive or negative form, the concept of orientation gives a name to the sort of shaking up, which I relate to Roland Barthes's 'ébranler.' I argue that such a shaking up takes place in the French Renaissance around the discovery of the New World, in the incorporation performed in the texts.^{xxvi}

Orientation, for Latour and Ahmed but also in general, has to do with the making and the mastery of space. I use ‘space’ not interchangeably with ‘environment’ but as a supplementary notion with its own implications. Where ‘environment’ points at the idea of a center, and of the act of being around said center, ‘space’ works in tandem with ‘time’ with more philosophical connotations. In the French definition of *espace*, one finds the frequent reference to an *étendue*, a stretch of land. In the Latin etymology, *spatium* refers firstly to areas that are defined by their limits, such as an arena or a racetrack, secondly to a stretch of land—the most common modern acceptance of ‘space’—but also to a distance, and, finally, to time: the Gaffiot dictionary lists “espace de temps, laps de temps [...] délai, répit.” More than ‘environment’, ‘space’ foregrounds emptiness and vastness. Making space would amount to measuring it up, mapping it out, tracing limits. Mastering space would come as a consequence of the making, and would amount to comprehending and understanding the space in question. In my readings, the very possibility of such a mastery is precisely what gets undone by those texts. The more human beings try to orient themselves in space—whether in the old world or the New—the more disoriented they effectively are.

Making and mastering space is one way, in fact, leads to the concept of ecology. Timothy Morton’s ecology, in general, is close to what I mean, as long as the human beings and the environment are related, interlaced, and profoundly intimate: “Ecology includes all the ways we imagine how we live together. Ecology is profoundly about coexistence. No man is an island. Human beings need each other as much as they need an environment. Human beings *are* each other’s environment.”^{xxvii} I will, however, suggest one difference: ecology is indeed “a vast, sprawling mesh of interconnection without a

definite center or edge,” and yet it is important that the human being remain, originally, convinced of her being at the center.^{xxviii} That is, just as the etymology of ‘environment’ will determine its conceptualization in this current project, that of ‘ecology’ guide my conception of this term. *Oikos*, the home, and *logos*, speech, are intrinsically human concepts, as far as we follow Pascal and his *roseau pensant*. Between Morton’s definition and the bare etymology is where the ecology of waste lies. There is a way in which an ecology—a form of belonging (*oikos*) and negotiating with (*logos*) the environment, of making a home—depends and relies on the many figures that waste takes in the French Renaissance.

The definitions of ‘environment’ and ‘ecology’ now exposed, their necessity established, I can explain their proper use in the present project: the adjective ‘environmental’—as it will come to qualify words such as event, thought, or text—has to do with an inherent quality of an object that either evokes or stages the relationship between the human and the nonhuman, and, importantly, that either places the human being at the center, or questions that position. I prefer it to ‘ecological’, commonly used interchangeably or indifferently with ‘environmental,’ for the political connotations of the former overwhelm the adjective more than the noun, ‘ecology’; as a result, ‘ecological’ seem more anachronistic, while ‘environmental’ is more accurate, for reasons exposed above. It is in this way that I will talk of Montaigne’s environmental thought, and simultaneously identify and analyze what I call an ecology of waste throughout these texts, in Renaissance France.

In the landscape of current Renaissance French studies, the aim of this project is to provide a reassessment of what is usually perceived—after Terence Cave, Michel

Jeanneret, and Mikhail Bakhtin—as a rhetorical abundance (*copia*) somehow related to or dependent upon a certain centrality of the belly and of food by inscribing this line of thought within the importance, signification and consequence of an over-arching notion of waste. The most recent and excellent work that establishes this is Rebecca Zorach’s *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in Renaissance France*.^{xxix} As an art historian, Zorach perceives the symbolic distinction between a positive abundance and a negative excess, and unfolds it into the four elements that constitute her title, and four respective chapters. The title expresses, already, the fact that abundance and excess can be found in representations of food, of bodies but also in writing and in economics. Her whole book should be considered a necessary reading before the present project, even if it is mostly focused on art history and architecture; Zorach has read and incorporated Terence Cave’s *Cornucopian Text* and the canon of Renaissance French literature, claiming at the beginning of her introduction that “French writers at the time perceived themselves as awash in excess.”^{xxx} She argues, crucially, that the French Renaissance, as a project started consciously by Francis 1st, has a lot to do with abundance and excess. She also convincingly emphasizes that, simultaneously with the overwhelming abundance at the time, there were many complaints and concerns for the consequences of such tastes, spending, and constructions. Perhaps the most striking element of her demonstration is this handwritten commentary found on reverse of an impression of *Meeting of Argonauts with Phineus*, engraving by René Boyvin, found at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam: “Since we must all die one day, to what end are so many goods, so many riches? Let us leave it all, abandon it all, because we will return as we have come; let us leave immediately all the goods of this world, because we will have

much more pleasant ones in the other, when we see God face to face, which will rejoice us forever in his pleasant person. Amen,” to which Zorach adds her own commentary: “Goods are precisely not good.”^{xxxix} This reaction to luxury, arguably shared by a great segment of the population, will notably help to understand Montaigne and Rabelais’s approach to expenditure in chapter II and IV. In my use of ‘abundance’, ‘excess’ and ‘luxury’, I depend greatly on her conceptualization of these terms.

Ultimately, the reflections and apprehensions both François Rabelais and Michel de Montaigne formulate in the face of expenditure will provoke, in a hypothesis that will need to be carefully verified, a purification process in the literature of the seventeenth-century.^{xxxix} The ecology of waste allows, moreover, for more coherent readings of Rabelais and Montaigne together. Brought together through the notion of waste, the intricacies of some of their poetics and concerns come to the foreground, illustrating a more philosophical and critical Rabelais—as opposed to the satirical, grotesque one or the erudite humanist one—on the one hand, and a more ambivalent and profoundly satirical Montaigne—as opposed to the first and foremost philosopher Montaigne. In fact, I will demonstrate that Rabelais intuited, in his works, a fair amount of issues for which Montaigne is better-known, in particular his ground-breaking critique of the colonization and conquest of the New World.

In the wider field of Renaissance studies, the project also inscribes itself in scholarship that attempts to grasp the multi-faceted consequences of Columbus’s discovery for the rest of the world.^{xxxix} Most especially, I will examine at the notion of *impact* – conceived as both environmental and intellectual – of the discovery of the New World as a *disorientation*. What happened when Columbus made contact with *terra firme*

in America that modified the way the environment was perceived for the inhabitants of the now old world? In the texts studied, I argue that everything unfolds in such a way as to suggest that the discovery of the New World had *altered* the perception of abundance in the kingdom of France. The dominion over nature, previously taken for granted, becomes deeply ambivalent. Hence, the citation of Montaigne that serves as the epigraph for this introduction: it is not, indeed, hunger or scarcity—a notion that subsumes both Rabelais’s and Montaigne’s call for a more reasoned consumption of the resources—but rather abundance itself that provokes avarice.^{xxxiv} The infiniteness of potential resources in the New World only seems to make the human beings less certain, more concerned about the sustainability of their endeavors. In this paradox lies the key to the ambivalence regarding the New World, regarding waste.

In the midst of countless back and forth scholarly arguments about dating the start of the Anthropocene, demonstrating the importance of any non-modern literary text for a better understanding of environmental issues and potential solutions remains crucial. Like Timothy Morton, who, in my second epigraph, claims that “The environment was born at the exact moment when it became a problem,” one is forced to admit that the determination of that “exact moment” is highly problematic. Instead of focusing too much on the notion of an initial environmental event located, insistently, somewhere around the Industrial Revolution, I would invite readers to perceive a multiplicity of small moments of unsettlement or disorientation, at any point of human history, physically veering and redirecting human endeavors towards their environment.^{xxxv} The most fascinating works in the field today, often foreclose the possibility of pre-modern interpretation.^{xxxvi} We might instead follow the example of the growing amount of

scholarship, particularly in the field of art history, that asserts the existence and problematization of capitalism and consumerism already at play in the early modern period.^{xxxvii}

There is, in my readings of Rabelais, Montaigne, Cartier and Thevet, an underlying Early Modern care or concern for sustainability. While Early Modern sustainability is obviously not that of renewable energies and veganism, this should not prevent scholars from exploring what this historically and geographically distant notion of it might suggest for thinking the concept today. Modern sustainability grew out of the Brundtland Commission's 1987 definition of 'sustainable development':

Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The concept of sustainable development does imply limits - not absolute limits but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organization on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities.^{xxxviii}

It was the Commission's original idea to use the adjective 'sustainable' to speak of the conditions under which humanity could and should continue to develop, and to attach it to the complementary notions of needs and of limits. The Commission's members probably arrived at the word through its existing use for "Capable of being maintained or continued at a certain rate or level"—the definition is that of the Oxford English Dictionary—since the adjective is used in 1924 to speak of the world's maximum sustainable population.^{xxxix} From population growth and control to environmentalism and economic, the word did not have a vast space to cross. In the "Our Common Future" report, the corresponding noun 'sustainability' and opposite adjective 'unsustainable' are also used frequently. In fact, the first occurrence of the word 'sustainable' in English, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, dates back to Cotgrave's *A dictionarie of the*

French and English tongues in 1611, with the French “soustenable.” One would then have to go back to the French lexicology and Latin etymology of the verb *soutenir* in order to get a sense of the modulations contained in the concept of sustainability beyond the Brundtland definition. Perhaps the most common meaning is to hold up and to support, of course. Yet, to sustain is also to preserve, to maintain; in this way, the initial verticality of the verb (whose image would be that of a prop or a stake for a plant) also implies idea of time and duration. Further down the list of meanings in the Oxford English Dictionary for the Latin *sustinere* are terms with a more negative dimension: “to bear the weight of, to shoulder, [...] to submit to, to endure [...]” It is in those modulations that one can trace back the notion of sustainability to the early modern period, and to these texts in particular.

There is an early modern concern for sustainability insofar as texts express concerns for how limited the resources are either through the need for supplementary resources on another continent (Cartier, Thevet) or through the denunciation of how gratuitous the search for more abundance really is (Montaigne). There is, also, a sense that the relationship with the environment in general is unsustainable, because human beings lack the necessary control over their environment—this will be blatant in Montaigne’s “Des cannibales.” Through his exhibition of excess, Rabelais really investigates, especially in Thélème and in the *Tiers Livre*, the conditions of duration of luxury on the one hand, the implications of debt and credit at the level of the environment on the other. They all seem to ask, when faced with visions of excess: what happens after we run out?

It is in this way that I relate this early modern version of sustainability to the theory of Georges Bataille. Writing across literature, philosophy, anthropology and economics, Bataille has always been difficult to understand for scholars of all these disciplines. One of his essays and a few other writings have recently been recuperated, so to speak, by ecocriticism — partly through the work of Allan Stoekl who translated a series of selected writings of Bataille as *Visions of Excess* for the University of Minnesota Press in 1985. The description of the book, probably authored by Stoekl, efficiently summarizes the way Bataille's work is being read, outside of literature, in the United States : the work, we are told, “[c]hallenges the notion of a “closed economy” predicated on utility, production, and rational consumption, and develops an alternative theory that takes into account the human tendency to lose, destroy, and waste.”^{xli} In his works, and more particularly in *La Part maudite* and in the essay “La Notion de dépense,” Bataille argues that societies are defined by the way they utilize the surplus they produce. Reversing the common, moral way of thinking about consumption – Jean Piel writes in the introduction to *La Part maudite* that “la morale de Bataille est une mise à l’envers de la morale courante” [Bataille’s moral is a reversing of the common morality]^{xlii} – the core of Bataille’s argument is that human societies might actually gain something from considerable wastefulness.^{xlii} Such a thought goes irremediably against the grain of most of modern ecology, which is in many ways a very moral ideology. The way that the aim of ecology has always been defined is to protect the nonhuman environment from destruction by humans.^{xliii} It is in that sense that Bataille’s *La Part maudite* is counter-intuitive for most ecological thinkers, although Allan Stoekl argues against such a restrictive vision of ecology in his study *Bataille’s Peak*.^{xliv} Bataille’s main argument in

La Part maudite, as represented in Stoekl's study, is explicated thus in a book review:

"Human beings received energy in excess of what it is needed for their reproduction. He argued that if that excess was not destroyed, then it would devastate human life.

Therefore, it has to be consumed through sacrificial, lavish expenditure."^{xlv}

Notably, Bataille is cited by Timothy Morton. But when the latter claims that "[j]ust as Georges Bataille suggested a 'general economy' that is wider than a normative 'restricted economy,' or closed system, so we can posit a 'general ecology,' what he misses is the fact that Bataille's general economy was *already* a general ecology."^{xlvi} Bataille's *notion de dépense*, translated by Stoekl as 'expenditure,' because of its profoundly futile and gratuitous dimension, is arguably the best equivalence for the notion of waste in this project. To what Stoekl calls Bataille's post-sustainability, I offer, on the other side of the spectrum, in a productive anachronism, Montaigne's and Rabelais's pre-sustainability.^{xlvii} Critically, all three—Bataille, Montaigne, and Rabelais—are marked by an ambivalent, paradoxical approach to waste, which might complicate in interesting ways modern ecology's issues with reducing waste.

Yet this is not the only insight that Renaissance French texts offer ecocriticism. Rather than an insight into the established, modern notion of it, I would suggest that Early Modern sustainability offers an alternative conception of sustainability. Just like Panurge should try to be "aultrement mesnagier," to spend in a different way, Rabelais provides, through his very particular style of satire, an alternative to modern ecology, which, I argue, often fails to convince because it takes itself too seriously, in other words, because it cannot laugh at itself.^{xlviii} What would it mean, Rabelais asks, for ecology to embrace the futility of its endeavors? Granted, it is a tight rope, just like the one that the

often misinterpreted and misunderstood Bataille walked. Yet, in the face of the many failings and missteps of political ecology, and of supranational attempts at regulating the use of global resources, one can hardly deny that there is a futility and vanity in the constant persistence of ecology—a certain idea of persistence that precisely resonates with the inexhaustible movements that pervade Rabelais and his “tonneau inexpuisible” and Montaigne and his “nous tourneviros çà et là”.^{xlix} Perhaps it is in part seriousness and the threats of darker futures that does little to encourage the public to change their environmental ways. Some scholars have explored, in recent years, what an even darker approach to ecology would look like, namely Timothy Morton in *Dark Ecology*. Their attempts, however, just like those of environmental films, can only express a universal anxiety towards the future. What could we gain, then, from a truly satirical, and perhaps cynical, ecology of waste?¹

* * *

The order of my chapters follows what seems to be, at first, a chronological logic. While the point is to demonstrate that, indeed, the more positive notion of abundance has apparently disappeared from textual representations by the end of the century, and that its corresponding, perhaps derogatory notion of excess significantly progresses throughout the century, the evolution is not as linear as the chronological order suggests. Instead, I would depict it as a conflict between a two dimensions of the same idea: one, a positive view, the other, a negative one. Instead, the order traces the notion from the most descriptive representations of waste to the most theoretical, from the degree zero and eye-witness accounts of explorers Thevet and Cartier, to the fiction of François Rabelais, to, finally, the philosophical essays of Michel de Montaigne.

In chapter I, “A Singular Abundance from the France Antarctique to Canada: the French *sauvage*,” I contest the perception of the New World as a predominantly positive site of abundance and fertility across the ocean, demonstrating instead how problematic the portrayal of abundance actually is in the eyewitness accounts of two French authors during the reign of Francis 1st: explorer and navigator Jacques Cartier in his three *Relations* and André Thevet, cosmographer of the king, in his *Singularités de la France Antarctique*. The chapter functions as a preliminary study of the status of abundance in the New World, which mirrors other sixteenth-century texts in their obsession with waste, as Terence Cave argued in *The Cornucopian Text*.

Insofar as Cartier and Thevet’s works were directed and addressed to the king, they inaugurate a certain paradigm for the genre, plagued by an early colonialist propaganda and stylistic redundancy. Fumbling to find the abundance and fertility that the king and public expect, Thevet and Cartier’s *bricolage* make the narratives resemble each other quite strikingly, whereas their locations could not be more opposed, at least for modern readers: luscious, tropical Brazil – a certain idea of an exotic South – and rocky, inhospitable Canada – a typical cliché of the North. I show the contradictions that surface when one fabricates hospitality and abundance out of lands that are clearly perceived as, in some way, strange and full of dangers. Yet I argue that asserting abundance in the New World is a necessary maneuver in these works, precisely compensating for the perception of excess and scarcity, the corresponding extremes of waste as I define it, from the perspective of the environment of France, on the other side of the Atlantic. Some criteria of the figures of singular abundance in these works are to be expected – redundancy, reliance on quantities and numbers, use of the marvelous—but others reveal an

epistemological break in the very understanding of the environment that exploration of the New World instigates. Firstly, through a rhetoric of satisfaction, an unlikely observation in the middle of uncivilized lands, both authors illustrate the burgeoning materialistic tendencies of sixteenth-century French society and some early and telling signs of capitalist and consumerist motivations. Second, they tend noticeably to erase the fact that these lands are indeed inhabited: while the inhabitants are featured, their lack of labor on their own land effectively disqualifies them from ownership of said land. Thevet and Cartier do not recognize agriculture, a paradoxical measure for authors whose task seems to be to represent the lands in as abundant and positive a light as possible. The fact that abundance therefore does not imply labor is, perhaps, the most telling of all signs of an epistemological break in the perception of the environment between 1492 and 1610—the former date’s significance needs not be explained, the latter is brought up by Bruno Latour, in his 6th Gifford conference, “Comment (ne pas) en finir avec la fin des temps?”^{li} The singular way in which they both succeed and fail at representing the abundance of those lands, in this way, seems to suggest that abundance, in sixteenth-century France, on both sides of the Atlantic, already cannot be seen as anything but problematic and ambivalent.

In chapter II, ““Et voilà l’ouvrage gasté”: Managing Waste from France to the New World in Rabelais’s *Chronicles*,” I turn to the author who has perhaps been most influential to certain idea of bodily waste in order to argue that no reading of waste in Rabelais’s works can ever be limited to a merely physical, that is to say human, conception of it. Rather, I make a case for reading the Rabelaisian text environmentally above all. In the process, it needs to be demonstrated that Mikhail Bakhtin’s

interpretation of Rabelais's works was an intuition perhaps of its environmental character, and as such, is as enlightening as it is limited. For instance, Bakhtin, for all his talk of death and rebirth, debasing and upgrading, arguably misses the true ambivalence of waste in the Rabelaisian text. If there is indeed an evolution to be noted throughout the books, it is not, as I demonstrate, the progressive disappearance of the lower bodily stratum in favor of more serious considerations. Instead, as a thorough analysis of the lexical uses of waste across the books—for instance, in the shift from the verb *gaster* in *Pantagruel* to the proper noun *Gaster* in the *Quart Livre*—this evolution entails the gradual perception of the ambivalence of all waste in Rabelais, always suggesting a care for the expenditure of resources.

As this evolution begins to emerge, so too does an increasing focus on the New World to the west. The obsession with waste in Rabelais and the multiple mentions of the colonization of America, that is, are curiously linked. The colonization of the American continent, which is contemplated for most of the century by the French kings, is figured as unnecessary and thus wasteful, satirized for instance in the episode inside of Pantagruel's mouth, at the end of *Pantagruel*, and that of the Thélème abbey, at the end of *Gargantua*.^{lii} By establishing how interconnected all bodies, human and nonhuman, are in the Rabelaisian text, we begin to see that waste marks a concern for how to manage reliability and interdependence.

I elaborate this Rabelaisian conception of waste through a *relecture* of the *Tiers Livre*, which situates the economic interpretations of it within an environmental notions of debt, revealing in the process a certain concern for sustainability beyond the immediate, gratuitous consumption of all things. Panurge and Diogenes are, in this

argument, the key characters that seem to embody, somewhere between folly (like Shakespeare's fools) and cynicism, early modern environmentalists. This leads me to consider whether satire is not perhaps the optimal tone for writing about ecology in general, something that is arguably missing from modern theories in ecocriticism.^{liii} From managing to sparing – *ménager* and *épargner* – the Rabelaisian text reflects on just how to properly use the resources of the environment.

The final two chapters come together in a section called “‘Une Agitation extraordinaire’ and the Vain Movement of Colonization: Waste and Consumption in the New World in Montaigne’s ‘Des Cannibales’ and ‘Des coches,’” a presentation which underscores an even deep affinity between these *essais*, which have long been studied together on the basis of their common topic, when they are considered environmentally. “Des Cannibales” and “Des coches” disclose, I argue, Montaigne’s environmental thought precisely through his widely-studied critique of the violence of colonization. It is important, therefore, that Montaigne writes at the end of the century that comprises the Renaissance *corpus*, allowing for a tentatively conclusive view of the *problématiques* at hand. Out of the two essays, the more obvious figures of waste are found in “Des coches,” with the ruin and devastation of the New World by the Spanish conquistadores. And yet, the foundations of this shift in the perception of the environment begin in the first pages of “Des Cannibales.”

In chapter III, “*Habiter et s’habituer*: Getting Used to the New World in ‘Des Cannibales,’ I identify Montaigne’s environmental thought as it arises from a perception of the environment as disorienting or unsettling: images of submersion under water emphasize environmental risk, resulting in a questioning of the position of the human

being in the midst of nonhuman events. Montaigne stages, throughout this essay, various versions of inhabitation, destabilizing what it means to inhabit a land. More than about consuming bodies – the topic expected from the title “Des Cannibales” – the essay addresses the consumption of lands by water, of human constructions by erosion, or, in fact, of human and nonhuman bodies, by one another. The *essai* thus establishes a disorienting environment, a significant position to adopt, in the context of imperialistic expansion and brutal conquest of the New World. I argue that because the essay contains such concern for, on the one hand, time and its fleetingness nature, and, on the other, spatial limits, there is an underlying anxiety about sustainability in Montaigne’s description of cannibals that is just as human(ist) as it is environmental. Like Cartier, Montaigne occasionally effaces human presence in his depiction of the environment, effectively operating a transatlantic parallel between the point of reference of the Caribbean islands the cannibals come from and his own local region of Médoc. In “Des Cannibales,” the ruin is clearly caused by the derogatory *trafique*, signified by the contrast with the moderate tastes of the cannibals Montaigne chooses to describe. The essay ultimately provides a careful scrutiny of environmental impact on both sides of the Atlantic.

Chapter IV, “Des coches’: The Nausea of Expenditure in the New World,” displays a similar, and yet somehow more vastly, unsettled environment. This is perhaps, I argue, because the ruin has extended: whereas it contaminated only a few tribes of cannibals in the first book of the *Essais*, it has now, in the middle of the third and last book, pervaded the known parts of the continent, as whole civilizations have been effectively reduced to ashes. The New World of “Des coches,” despite remaining quite

new, is represented as a veritable wasteland. Behind the theme of transportation that spans the essay from title to end, I unravel a *mal des transports* [sea-sickness], a nausea, implying, in my reading, that Montaigne resents the events he narrates in this essay – namely, the death of Atahualpa and the ruin of the Inca civilization. The figure of waste for this essay is devastation, but it is also wastefulness. The essay presents human beings who go outside of their comfort zones, of their usual boundaries – be it in spatial terms or, for instance, those of commerce and cruelty. By exposing how distant, global events affect the personal level, Montaigne reveals how incredibly connected the environment of the sixteenth-century must have felt for his contemporaries.

This leads to a consideration of the paradox that underlies the essay: its apparent critique of expenditure in general, dissonant with the overwhelming fascination with luxury and rhetorical excess. Because Georges Bataille's *La Part maudite* displays a very similar contrast, and is considered to be a thinking of "post-sustainability," I propose that, to some extent, Montaigne appears to be a thinker of pre-sustainability. He asks what it would entail to become too invested in *dépense*, from the consideration of infrastructures in Paris to that of the use of gold in the Inca civilization. For Montaigne, I argue, utilitarianism is already insufficient. Curiously, perhaps Montaigne's ambivalence towards *dépense* is also ours, as we face, as a society, the necessity to reign in our consumption in the current environmental crisis. Even more significant, perhaps, is the fact that the discussion of *dépense* and gratuitousness culminates in the staging of a Roman circus, that is to say, a manipulation and appropriation of the environment for human leisure and pleasure. Montaigne advocates, in the end, for a moderate version of

colonization, opposed to the picture he painted of the Spanish conquest of South America.

The New World chapters of Montaigne's *Essais*, once considered together, thus articulate a foundational paradox of what I would call the care for the environment: the awareness of the need for a reasoned consumption of the resources (for an ecology of moderation) will frequently go hand in hand, or necessitate negotiation with a fascination for the very same consumption of the resources, a fascination with waste.

ⁱ Montaigne, Michel, *Les Essais*, par Pierre Villey, Paris: Quadrige, 2004, 62.

ⁱⁱ Morton, Timothy, *Ecology Without Nature : Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2007, 141.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Katie Chenoweth's recent article, "The Beast, the Sovereign, and the Letter: Vernacular Posthumanism," in *symplokē*, vol. 23, No 1-2, Posthumanisms, 2015, 41-56.

^{iv} *Radiohead's Kid A*, by Marvin Lin, New York : Bloomsbury, 2010, 88.

^v I am indebted to Laurent Dubreuil for his *trouvaille* in Artaud's *Le pèse-nerfs* : "Toute l'écriture est de la cochonnerie." Antonin Artaud, *L'ombilic des Limbes, précédé de Correspondance avec Jacques Rivière et suivi de le Pèse-Nerfs. Fragments d'un journal d'enfer. L'art de la mort*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1968). 106

^{vi} See Khanna, Ranjana, "Disposability," in *differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Volume 20, Number 1, Baltimore: Brown University Press, 2009, 181-198. The quotes are from p. 184 and 186.

^{vii} Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: an essay on abjection*, New York : Columbia University Press, 1982.

^{viii} Kristeva, 3.

^{ix} Douglas, Mary, *Purity and Danger: an analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*, London; New York: Routledge, 2005 (1966), 36.

^x Cave, Terence, *The Cornucopian Text: problems of writing in the French Renaissance*, Oxford [Eng.] : Clarendon Press ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1979, and Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rabelais and His World*, Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1968.

^{xi} The *Oxford English Dictionary* places the Old French origin in the forefront in its etymology, before the Latin *vastus*. It also gives a comparative etymology in the Romance languages: "Compare Provençal *gast* ravage, waste, Spanish *gasto*, Portuguese *gasto* expense, Italian *guasto* ravage, damage, injury."

^{xii} The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives *vastus* while in the entry for *gâter* in the TLFi, it is *vastare*.

^{xiii} The definitions in English all come from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

^{xiv} My use of the notion of ambivalence will be dependent on Karen Pinkus's definition of it in *Alchemical Mercury*, through her reading of Derrida's essay, "Plato's Pharmacy": "Thus we are forced to recall that *ambi*-valence is not only a conscious sense of uncertainty, but also, more

rigorously, the coexistence of *two* different and perhaps irreconcilable elements” (5). Pinkus, Karen, *Alchemical Mercury: a Theory of Ambivalence*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

^{xv} See the entry for “ecology” in the *OED*.

^{xvi} For more details, see chapter II, p. 3, in particular footnote number 6. Buell, Lawrence, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, Cambridge, MA : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995, and *Writing for an Endangered World: literature, culture, and environment in the U.S. and beyond*, Cambridge, Mass. : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001. Also *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*, Malden, MA : Blackwell Pub., 2005. Morton, Timothy, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2007. *The Ecological Thought*, Cambridge, Mass. ; London : Harvard University Press, 2012. *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, New York : Columbia University Press, 2016.

^{xvii} Among various debates that are pointless to sum up here, Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin identify the start of the Anthropocene as 1610. See Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, “Defining the Anthropocene,” *Nature* 519 (12 March 2015): 175.

^{xviii} It is Jane Bennett’s subtitle to *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, although her definition of it is unclear.

^{xix} For details on this and on “environement,” see chapter III, p.3: “It is a medieval French word, *environement*, appearing circa 1265 in the Brunetto Latini’s *Trésor*, where it involves a circuit, a circle, and later on, the act of surrounding, in the *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*.”

^{xx} Natures-cultures in the plural is a concept developed by Bruno Latour in *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes*: “Mais la notion même de culture est un artefact créé par notre mise entre parenthèses de la nature. Or il n’y a pas plus de cultures – différentes ou universelles – qu’il n’y a de nature universelle. Il n’y a que des natures-cultures, et ce sont elles qui offrent la seule base de comparaison possible” (140). Latour, Bruno, *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes: essai d’anthropologie symétrique*, Paris : éditions de la Découverte, 1991.

^{xxi} Ahmed, Sara, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2006.

^{xxii} The talk is available on his website : <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/150-CORNELL-2016-.pdf>. The quotation is from p. 1.

^{xxiii} Latour, Bruno, *Face à Gaïa : huit conférences sur le nouveau régime climatique*, Paris : La Découverte, 2015, 11.

^{xxiv} *OED*, entry for “orientation.”

^{xxv} Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 3.

^{xxvi} Barthes, Roland, *Sur Racine*, Paris: Seuil, 1963, 11. Here is the complete quotation: “Écrire, c’est ébranler le sens du monde, y disposer une interrogation indirecte, à laquelle l’écrivain, par un dernier suspens, s’abstient de répondre. La réponse, c’est chacun de nous qui la donne, y apportant son histoire, son langage, sa liberté ; mais comme histoire, langage et liberté changent infiniment, la réponse du monde à l’écrivain est infinie : on ne cesse jamais de répondre à ce qui a été écrit hors de toute réponse : affirmés, puis mis en rivalité, puis remplacés, les sens passent, la question demeure.” [“To write is to jeopardize the meaning of the world, to put an *indirect* question that the writer, by an ultimate abstention, refrains from answering. It is each of us who gives the answer, bringing to it his own history, his own language, his own freedom; but since history, language, and freedom are infinitely variable, the world’s answer to the writer is infinite: there is no end to answering what has been written beyond hope of an answer: asserted, disputed, superseded – the meanings pass, the question remains.”] The translation is from Barthes, Roland, *On Racine*, tr. Richard Howard, New York: Hill and Wang, 1964, ix.

^{xxvii} Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 4.

^{xxviii} *Ibid.*, 8.

^{xxix} Zorach, Rebecca, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

^{xxx} Ibid., 2.

^{xxxi} Ibid., 184.

^{xxxii} Again, the concept is that of Bruno Latour's, in *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, and yet he does not take into account the actual, visual and figurative progressive disappearance of excess in the literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. This is one clear way, nonetheless, in which the process of purification involved in modernity can be demonstrated. Instead of the ambivalence that presides over our ecology of waste in sixteenth-century texts, the rest of the early modern period will be marked by a more clearly defined separation between the pure *classiques* (think Boileau, Racine) and the wasteful baroque (think d'Aubigné, d'Urfé, Corneille).

^{xxxiii} To name only a few: Ramachandran, Ayesha, *The Worldmakers: Global Imagining in Early Modern Europe*, Chicago, London: the University of Chicago Press, 2015; Lestringant, Frank, *L'atelier du cosmographe, ou l'image du monde à la Renaissance*, Paris : A. Michel, 1991 (translated into English by the University of California Press at Berkeley in 1994, *Mapping the Renaissance World : the geographical imagination in the age of discovery*) ; Wey-Gómez, Nicolás, *The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies*, Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, 2008 ; Crosby, Alfred W., *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences for 1492*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003 (1987) ; Gruzinski, Serge, *Les quatre parties du monde: histoire d'une mondialisation*, Paris: Editions de la Martinière, 2004.

In a less scholarly vein, I was greatly inspired by Charles C Mann's *1491*, where he debunks the perception that the native populations of the American continent had not impacted their land, and that they did not possess a knowledge or practice of agriculture. See Mann, Charles C., *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, New York: Vintage Books, 2011 (2005).

^{xxxiv} For more on the notion of avarice itself, see the excellent recent book-length study by Jonathan Patterson, *Representing Avarice in Late Renaissance France*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2015. As he puts it, "Representation of avarice in late Renaissance France contained strong moral value judgements relating to the appropriation and dispensation of wealth" (5). In ways similar to Zorach, Patterson studies the moral implications of the concept of avarice. He also focuses on the influence of Renaissance Humanism on the conception of avarice. His chapter on "Montaigne's Avarice" is preceded by the epigraph "Et liberal, et avare, et prodigue, tout cela je voy en moy aucunement" [generous, miserly, and then prodigal – I can see something of all that in myself.] (201). Chapter IV of the present project will dwell on Montaigne's ambivalence towards avarice, but instead of focusing on enrichment and status-seeking, like Patterson, avarice will be treated as one dimension of moderation in the general concept of waste.

Insofar as a more moderate consumption is suggested, in my opinion, by Montaigne and Rabelais, the work of Todd Reeser in *Moderating Masculinity in Early Modern Culture* paved the way for such considerations, although mainly in terms of ethics, morality, and gender. He does write, in his Introduction, about Michel Jeanneret's idea of a "menace de la démesure" in "Débordements rabelaisiens", and relates it to Montaigne's referring to the New World as "un país infini": "To give one example, the anxiety of "démesure" associated with the New World is projected onto certain Amerindians, whose "immoderate" climate is assumed to cause their immoderation, partially to dispel a French anxiety of the "infinite" land mass that some assumed the Americas to be" (20). See also Jeanneret, Michel, "Débordements rabelaisiens," *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, Spring 1991: 110.

^{xxxv} For the excellent demonstration of the etymology of environment through the verb "virer," see Karen Pinkus, "The Risks of Sustainability," in *Criticism, Crisis, and Contemporary Narrative. Textual Horizons in an Age of Global Risk*, ed. Paul Crosthwaite. London: Routledge, 2011, pp. 62-80.

^{xxxvi} For example, Stacy Alaimo, in *Bodily Natures*, advocates for :“Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from “the environment” (2). Since such a trans-corporeality is precisely an element of the early modern representation of both human and nonhuman bodies, it is surprising that Alaimo only develops her argument in very modern examples, without ever suggesting that perhaps trans-corporeality is a concept that used to exist and has been, arguably, lost in modernity. Too often, on the opposite end, advocating for a pre-modern ecocriticism leads to an apparently correlated and necessary abstraction of ideas, beyond anthropocentricity, and closer to object oriented ontology. This is arguably what happens with the work of Jeffrey Cohen, who himself comes from medieval studies, notably in his latest book. For more details, see Alaimo, Stacey, *Bodily Natures: science, environment, and the material self*, Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 2010, and Cohen, Jeffrey, *Stone : an Ecology of the Inhuman*, Minneapolis, MN : University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

^{xxxvii} In my opinion, the best demonstrations of the validity of such directions are : Mukerji, Chandra, *From Graven Images : Patterns of Modern Materialism*, New York : Columbia University Press, 1983, and, of course, Rebecca Zorach’s *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold*. The discourse started with Goldthwaite, Richard A., *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy: 1300-1600*, Baltimore and London: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

^{xxxviii} The definition can be found in the pdf version of the Brundtland Commission report, entitled “Our Common Future,” on the United Nations website (<http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>), 16.

^{xxxix} The *Oxford English Dictionary*, in its entry for ‘sustainable,’ cites as an example an 1924 issue of the *American Political Science Review*.

^{xl} Bataille, Georges, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1985. The description comes from the press’s website : <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/visions-of-excess>.

^{xli} My translation.

^{xlii} Bataille, Georges, *La Part maudite; La Notion de dépense*, Paris: Minuit, 1967, 15.

^{xliii} The *OED* defines ecology as “The study of or concern for the effect of human activity on the environment; advocacy of restrictions on industrial and agricultural development as a political movement; (also) a political movement dedicated to this.”

^{xliv} Stoekl, Allan, *Bataille’s Peak: Energy, Religion and Postsustainability*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

^{xlvi} Obarrio, Juan M., book review of *Bataille’s Peak* in *Cultural Anthropology*, Volume 24, Issue 4 November 2009, 752–755.

^{xlvi} Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 109. It is even stranger that he seems to imply it immediately after, when he argues that Bataille “includes ecology in thinking about economics.” The deeply ecological ramifications of Bataille’s work are best identified and illustrated in Allan Stoekl’s *Bataille’s Peak*, where he coins the term “post-sustainability” to name whatever it is that Bataille is doing with the sun, energy, and religion. See Stoekl, Allan, *Bataille’s Peak: Energy, Religion and Postsustainability*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

^{xlvi} The notion of productive anachronisms is Laurent Dubreuil’s, and is perhaps most efficiently exhibited in his 2016 article, “Francophone Circulation: Coriolan Ardouin, Charles Baudelaire, and the Black Butterfly Effect” in *l’Esprit Créateur*, vol. 56, Number 1, Spring 2016, pp. 40-51.

^{xlvi} In fact, up to recently, in the history of the reception of Rabelais, his work was taken too seriously. Arguably, after a few decades of focusing mainly on the more comical and physical aspects of his work, he is now, incredibly, either still read too seriously, or not read seriously enough. What I mean by that is that all Rabelaisian scholars expect to be able to find an

incredible erudition, a reworking of the Ancients, and a complex satire – which have been recent focus of panels, for instance, at the Renaissance Society of America, in 2016 in Boston – and yet the more philosophical and conceptual interpretations still are reserved for Montaigne.

^{xlix} Rabelais, François, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1994, 351, and Montaigne, Michel, *Les Essais*, par Pierre Villey, Paris: Quadrige, 2004, 907. For close readings of these passages, see the last paragraphs of Chapter II, and the last paragraphs of Chapter IV.

ⁱ For details on how satire fits with ecology, see the second section of Chapter II, entitled “Is Satire the Tone of Ecology?” For what it has to do with cynicism, see my upcoming article based on Rabelais’s representation of Diogenes in the prologue to the *Tiers Livre*, “Is Ecology Absurd? Diogenes and the End of Civilization” in *Early Modern Écologies*, forthcoming with the University of Amsterdam Press.

ⁱⁱ Historically and strictly speaking, the present project does not go beyond the early 1590s, date around which Montaigne still revises and rewrites his *Essais* and before his death. In a later form, however, the project would include a final chapter on Agrippa d’Aubigné’s *Les Tragiques*, published in 1616.

ⁱⁱⁱ Note, of course, that these passages are even more emphasized by their position as ultimate chapters of their respective books.

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ As I explain in the chapter, it seems to be suggested at least, or perhaps avoided by Timothy Morton in most of his work, that his conception of a dark ecology would imply a form of dark humor.

Chapter I

A Singular Abundance from the France Antarctique to Canada: the French *sauvage*

“We may discern a certain sense of primitivism in this attitude toward French superabundance in agriculture (resembling colonial attitudes toward the New World, for instance).”

Rebecca Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold*¹

“The kind of homogenising capital-intensive transformation of people, trade, economy and environment with which we are familiar today can be traced back at least as far as the beginnings of European colonial expansion, as the agents of new European capital and urban markets sought to extend their areas of operation and sources of raw materials.”

Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism*²

In the French Renaissance, the trend of travel narratives partially moves its focus from the East to the West, from the Orient to the New World. If the narratives on the Orient partake widely in the elaboration of exoticism, those that take the western New World as their object operate on a similar tension. Edward Said famously problematizes the compensating force at play in such constructions of images – for him, geographies are man-made: “The Orient was almost a European invention and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.”³ In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed cites Said in order to establish, precisely, that the Orient is not an empty place, in that it “is full of all that which is not Europe.”⁴ In significant ways—that will be developed below—such an argument could be a pertinent view of what happens in the West, in the sixteenth century, around the

¹ Zorach, *op. cit.*, 89.

² Grove, Richard H., *Green Imperialism: Colonial expansion, tropical island Edens and the origins of environmentalism 1600-1860*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 2.

³ Said, Edward W., *Orientalism*, London: Routledge, 1978, 9.

⁴ Ahmed, *op. cit.*, 114.

pondered and ultimately failed conquests of Canada and Brazil by the French crown. In *The Poetry of Place: Lyric, Landscape and Ideology in Renaissance France*, Louisa Mackenzie depicts the environment in comparison with the literary landscape and describes the former as undeniably altered:

The physical landscape was likewise transformed: population growth, water pollution, deforestation, and contention over use of forestry resources, the shift from feudal farming to sharecropping, all left visible effects on the real places of Renaissance France.⁵

If such was the case, Renaissance France, the already-old world, was perceived as lacking somewhat in fertility and abundance at the same time as it was looking to expand across the Atlantic, and as it strove to find abundance there. Moreover, forestry resources and deforestation, insofar as they were concerns at the time, would have led explorers like Cartier or Thevet to seek greener pastures in the New World. What did French explorers see in America's environment, and what does it reveal about how altered their perception of the environment in France, but also as a unified concept, was?

This is a study of how differently French writers wrote about America; not only did they write about it in different ways than Spanish explorers did, they also wrote about it in significantly different ways from the way the French environment was represented at the time. They turned the New World into the location of an early modern French conception of exoticism distinct from the Orient: it could arguably be called, already, *wilderness*, even though the term went on to connote a much more modern version of America. Greg Garrard dates the cultural prominence of the concept to the eighteenth century with the Romantic poets in the Lake District, and from then on, with Thoreau, it

⁵ Mackenzie, Louisa, *The Poetry of Place: Lyric, Landscape and Ideology in Renaissance France*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011, 5.

is irremediably associated with the experience of the New World.⁶ Indeed, while they recycle some of the clichés of medieval oriental travel writing, from Marco Polo to John de Mandeville, who have long been identified as crucial sources for Christopher Columbus, the narratives of French explorers in the New World have a distinctive approach.⁷ In the context of interrogating the status of waste in relation to writing about the New World, it is necessary to look at two authors who both physically travelled to America, and to provide a glimpse into how explorers and cosmographers considered not only the landscapes, not only the people of the New World, but the environment.⁸

These writers are, for the purpose of this study, Jacques Cartier and André Thevet. While the latter has long gained recognition as a literary writer, owing in particular to the work of Frank Lestringant, Jacques Cartier knows—and, truthfully, perhaps deserves—no such favor. There is much less rhetorical flourish, and even much less material to speak of, in Cartier’s sparse *Relations* than in the long *Singularitez de la France*

⁶ Garrard, Greg, *Ecocriticism*, London: Taylor and Francis, 2012, 66. The concept of American wilderness, in fact, is mostly synthesized to the works of Henry David Thoreau, especially *Walden* and *Maine Woods* (respectively 1854 and 1864).

⁷ This topic is at the center of long-standing, unresolved debates over whether or not Columbus did or did not read both John de Mandeville and Marco Polo’s works. In *The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies*, Nicolás Wey Gómez implies that he did, on several occasions, evoking Columbus’s “early reading” of Mandeville and his “following Marco Polo’s cues” in his design of the trip (219, and 11). Miles H. Davidson’s biography of Columbus, *Columbus Then and Now: A Life Reexamined* exposes the debate, with Stephen Greenblatt affirming them to be Columbus’s main literary sources, and argues that these sources are but a later imposition and impression due to the many commentaries relating Columbus to both writers, by for instance Bernáldez, or even that they belonged to Columbus’s son, Hernando. See Davidson, *Columbus Then and Now: A Life Reexamined*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997, p. 86.

⁸ This is the reason Jean de Léry is left out of the study. While remarkable in the early construction of the “bon sauvage,” the *Histoire d’un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil* (Paris: Libr. Générale française, 1994) looks more at the Amerindians than at their relationships with their surroundings. Second, environment is here defined as that which surrounds the human being, but also that over which humanity believes it has granted dominion and with which human beings interact.

Antarctique. They certainly are extremely different writers, if only in their education and ambition. Yet their narratives are similar in many significant ways, one of them being how they describe the New World's environment. They both partake in the construction of knowledge on America in the European culture of the Renaissance. Cartier's travel writings will go on to fill the pages of such cosmographic anthologies as that of Giovanni Ramusio – while Thevet seems to plagiarize the latter – and that of Richard Hakluyt.⁹ Both of them, to some extent, underwent criticism, for their mistakes in observing and testifying about the New World, and for embellishing the truth.¹⁰ It is this embellishment, however, and the modulations and categories it brings about, that occasions this chapter. With Cartier describing the Northern, cold and rocky Canada, and Thevet depicting the almost tropical, warm and lush France Antarctique—Brazil—it is quite curious that both

⁹ Giovanni Battista Ramusio, from his position as a Venetian diplomat and geographer, received details of Spanish, Portuguese and French explorers, published a translation in Italian of first-hand accounts of exploration and travels, *Delle navigationi et viaggi*, the first volume of which appeared in 1550. Owing much to Ramusio's work, Richard Hakluyt, a British geographer who meant to promote Elizabethan overseas expansion, publishes *The principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English nation* in 1598. It is not certain whether Hakluyt translated himself, or merely was involved in its publication, but in 1580 a translation of Jacques Cartier's *Relations* is published in London. For details, see ed. Claire Jowitt and Daniel Carey, *Richard Hakluyt and Travel Writing in Early Modern Europe*, London: Routledge, 2012, 50. As for Ramusio, he translates Jacques Cartier's *Relations* in his third volume. In a demonstration of the complexities of intertextuality in the context of New World discovery and exploration in particular, Ramusio is also known to be a poorly disclosed source for André Thevet's *Singularitez*. For more on that, see *André Thevet's North America : A Sixteenth-Century View*, in the introduction by Roger Schlesinger and Arthur P. Stabler, Kingston : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986, xxvii.

¹⁰ In a footnote to the introduction of *André Thevet's North America*, the most thorough description of the quarrel between André Thevet and François de Belleforest can be found: "Belleforest noted that a "certain author of Singularitez Antarctiques" stole from other authors and accepted rumor as truth. See François de Belleforest, *La Cosmographie universelle de tout le monde, Auteur en partie Munster...* 2 vols. (Paris: 1575), 2: cols. 2039-40. Adhémar has shown that Thevet in fact had seen Belleforest's *Cosmographie* before his own was published and that he had taken, almost verbatim, entire passages from Belleforest. See his *André Thevet*, p. 76." See note 60, p. xxxiv.

authors make use of similar literary devices, and similar criteria, to assert the abundance of the new lands.

America features in different ways in Cartier and Thevet. Cartier is concise but redundant, and writes three accounts of his voyages to Canada for the king.¹¹ He describes the same places twice, or three times—for instance, Terre-Neuve—and each account is relatively short. Thevet, on the other hand, wants to establish himself as a cosmographer, and systematically describes every single step of the travel on the way to Brazil. As a result, half of the *Singularitez* features the Canaries, Madeira, Africa, and Madagascar, before finally arriving to the object of its title, France Antarctique. While Cartier will go on to be remembered as the first real explorer of Canada, Thevet will have no such fame, but will indeed become cosmographer of Francis 1st.¹²

'Aca nada': Contradicting Abundance

Despite these diverging ambitions, what emanates the most from their texts is their perception of the overwhelming abundance and fertility of the new lands, a strange coincidence as it has been noted above. In *Green Imperialism*, analyzing the notion of paradise as it relates to the New World, Richard H. Grove highlights the contradiction inherent to a discovery narrative: “A powerful tension, or contradiction, is built up between wishful perceptions of the island as a lush paradise and perceptions of it as a place beset by risks from drought, disease and native people, albeit enslaved.”¹³ Grove’s focus is the tropical island, insofar as it seemed to be the landfall for most of the explorers at the time, from the Canary islands to the Caribbean islands. Canada is hardly

¹¹ Cartier succeeds Giovanni da Verrazano as the official explorer of king Francis 1st.

¹² For details, see Frank Lestringant’s excellent biography, *André Thevet: Cosmographe des derniers Valois*, Genève: Droz, 1991.

¹³ Grove, *op. cit.*, 35.

tropical, yet the resemblance between Grove's contradiction and Cartier and Thevet's descriptions is undeniable. It could be argued that the overwhelming wilderness of France Antarctique and Canada in the sixteenth century made them resemble one another perhaps more than modern day Québec and Brazil do. Furthermore, they also resemble the descriptions, canonical already by the second half of the sixteenth century in Europe, of Columbus and Peter Martyr d'Anghiera.¹⁴ However, these authors kept their focus on the Spanish and Portuguese discoveries and conquests. Jacques Cartier and André Thevet turn their attention to the "new" lands of France Antarctique—a portion of Brazil that was coveted by the French crown and colonized by Nicolas de Villegaignon from 1555 to 1567—and Terre-neuve (Newfoundland) and its surrounding islands from 1534 to 1542.¹⁵

Yet what is true of the tropical island, where Grove's argument is based, is not necessarily valid for continental America, just like what is true of southern America is not

¹⁴ Thevet's exact knowledge in terms of other travel narratives is more accessible than that of Cartier, which remains a mystery. As a "lettré," Thevet most likely knew the compilations of Ramusio. Cartier, on the other hand, was a merchant turned explorer, and as thus, could have anything from a poor knowledge on America, to an admiration for Columbus's letters.

¹⁵ Jacques Cartier's authorship is rightfully questioned, since the published account is more likely written by the hand of an anonymous writer that accompanied the expedition. For details on Cartier's *Relations* and authorship, see the introduction by Biggar, H.P. in his edition of *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1924. While it is not written of his own hand, it is however likely that it was the work of a scribe working under his dictation, although this seems to be contested for instance by Gaston Marin, who speaks of the "rédacteur du journal" as a real author who reacts to the surroundings in *Jacques Cartier et la découverte de l'Amérique du Nord*, Paris: Gallimard, 1938, p. 140. Whether Thevet actually read or was inspired by Cartier is a legitimate question, remaining unanswered. As Roger Schlesinger and Arthur P. Stabler write in their introduction to *André Thevet's North America: A Sixteenth-Century View*, "although the account of Jacques Cartier's second voyage to the Gulf of Saint Lawrence [...] had already been published, Thevet declared that he had to write about Canada because no one else had yet done so, and because he had obtained a knowledge of the region from Cartier himself" (Schlesinger and Stabler, xxi)¹⁵. Secretly, it seems, Thevet had actually read and gotten large inspiration from the third volume of Battista Ramusio's *Delle navigationi et viaggi*, most particularly of the letter of Giovanni da Verrazzano, the first and second relation of Jacques Cartier, and the discourse of Jean Parmentier (Schlesinger and Stabler xxvii).

automatically true for northern America. One would indeed expect such abundance and paradisiac qualities in the islands first discovered by Columbus. As a result, the abundance and fertility exposed, imagined and iterated in Cartier and Thevet, in comparison, appear fabricated and hyperbolic. Even more, the resemblance between both narratives points to a common need for such a rhetorical inflation of the New World. There would be, furthermore, a few ways to justify this common rendering of an attractive, fertile, abundant new land: the most logical one is that there is a need to affirm the potential profitability of any colonial endeavors on the part of the French king. In the context of the current project, however, I would suggest a less political, more environmental explanation, hinted at by Rebecca Zorach's quotation in the epigraph of the present chapter. She evokes a "superabundance," one that is definitively an aesthetic, economic, social construction, that can be found on both sides of the Atlantic: in the kingdom of France, where it inflates agriculture, and in the New World, where "colonial attitudes," or perhaps colonial ambitions, distort the perception and representation of the land. In this way, one could see how a progressive perception of excess on the one hand, and of scarcity on the other, over the course of the sixteenth century, in the very land of France, builds up the urgency for a more positive, undeniable abundance someplace else, someplace that could be conquered and possessed. Whether or not such a distortion is consciously fabricated, it is unmistakable and conspicuous when one reads these texts.

Despite the distance separating the two French settlements, and despite the fact that one is situated in the Southern hemisphere, while the other is almost at the opposite parallel from the equator in the Northern hemisphere, both texts remain filled with images of abundance. It is easy to understand how Brazil could be described thus, but

Canada, as the legendary origin of its name suggests, can hardly claim its own fertility. The legend, in fact, tells of Spanish and Portuguese mariners having long known this place, yet, seeing it from their boats, would have deemed it Canada, meaning “aca nada,” “There, there is nothing.”¹⁶ The French crown arrives late in the game of colonization of the New World, just like the French authors arrive late to its exploration and description. As a result of this delay, they probably get some inspiration from the previous voyages of Columbus or Verrazano. Their version of abundance, however, is significantly different. This could either be a propriety of the land itself – despite the blatant differences between tropical Brazil and northern Canada – or a result of a change in the needs and desires that define the perception of what abundance is. In other words, perhaps the abundance of Cartier and Thevet’s New World owes just as much to factors in the economy and agriculture of sixteenth-century France than to a certain quality of the land itself.

Criteria of Abundance: Columbus’s Gold Standard

The gold standard of New World travel accounts, in the sixteenth-century, is undeniably Christopher Columbus. One finds similar criteria of abundance, therefore, in his letters to the Catholic Kings Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, and in Cartier’s *Relations*, and Thevet’s *Singularitez*, in that they are all addressed, to some extent, to the royal powers. The main ones, detectable in most of the works studied in the present chapter, are beauty, fertility, quality, and size. In other words, the land needs to

¹⁶ This turns out to be a popular, legendary etymology, although it does seem to have some factual dimension. In *Naming Canada*, Alan Rayburn writes that “It may have been father Louis Hennepin who first observed the similarity of the Spanish “aca nada” (here nothing) to Canada. He reported in 1698 that early Spanish explorers were disappointed in not finding gold and other riches in Canada, and frequently made that derisive declaration. It is said that native people took up the phrase and passed it to Cartier as the name of their country. The historian Charlevoix mentioned it as an old tradition in his history of New France, published in 1744” (14).

appear beautiful, fertile, good, and big. To the rather extreme simplicity of descriptive qualities is added the tactical efficiency of numbers and great quantity. In the first description of the island Española, Columbus's version of abundance is redundant and undeniable, through the devices listed above:

[...] la qual y todas las otras son *fertilísimas* en *demasiado grado*, y esta en *extremo*. en ella ay muchos puertos en la costa de la mar, *sin comparación* de otros que yo sepa en cristianos, y *fartos rios y buenos y grandes, que es maravilla*. las tierras d'ella son altas, y en ella muy *muchas* sierras y montañas *altísimas*, *sin comparación* de la ysla de Teneryfe ; todas ferosísimas, de mill fechuras, y todas andables, y llenas de árboles de mill maneras y altas, y parece que llegan al cielo; y tengo por dicho que jamás pierden la foja, según lo puedo comprehender, que los ví tan verdes y tan hermosos como son por mayo en España, y d'ellos estaban floridos, d'ellos con fruto, y d'ellos en otro término, según es su calidad; [...]. en las tierras ay muchas minas de metales, é ay gente in estimable número. la española es maravilla.¹⁷

[This island and all the others are very fertile to a limitless degree, and this island is extremely so. In it there are many harbours on the coast of the sea, beyond comparison with others which I know in Christendom, and many rivers, good and large, which is marvellous. Its lands are high, and there are in it very many sierras and very lofty mountains, beyond comparison with the island of Tenerife. All are most beautiful, of a thousand shapes, and all are accessible and filled with trees of a thousand kinds and tall, and they seem to touch the sky. And I am told that they never lose their foliage, as I can understand, for I saw them as green and as lovely as they are in Spain in May, and some of them were flowering, some bearing fruit, and some in another stage, according to their nature. [...] In the interior are mines of metals, and the population is without number. Española is a marvel.]

Columbus is generous with superlatives, hyperboles and exaggerations: “en demasiado grado” is soon followed by “en extremo,” adding up the excess. “Muchos,” “fartos,” “mill” constitute a gradation in quantity, from a mere many to an exaggerated thousand, iterated several times, “mill fechuras,” “mill maneras.” The conjunction “y” comes as an additive, making sentences longer and longer, always outbidding. Twice in the paragraph,

¹⁷ Columbus, Christopher, *The Four Voyages of Columbus, a history in eight documents, including five by Christopher Columbus, in the original spanish, with english translations*, translated and edited with introduction and notes by Cecil Jane, New York : Dover Publications, 1988, p.5-7.

he reiterates “sin comparación” – a preterition by definition – directing the narrative at the Old World: “en cristianos” represents all the lands of Christianity, while “Tenerife” is another island of reference—since before the discovery, it would have been the most fertile possession of the Spanish crown. Towards the end of the description, the land gives way to what most interests the Kings: mines, in order to exploit them, and people, in order to convert them. Finally, the word “maravilla” gets iterated one last time to place the island in the realm of the marvelous, pointing at the medieval literature of exotic marvels such as Mandeville’s *Travels* and Marco Polo’s *Book of the Marvels of the World*. If this paragraph sets the standard of marvelous abundance in the New World for the rest of the sixteenth century, the French version of abundance differs greatly: it can be, at times, isolated, more ambivalent, less concentrated.

Mitigating Abundance

Indeed, compared with Columbus’s letter, and although they still use the same devices and criteria to signify it, the abundance of the New World in Cartier and Thevet appears mitigated: they use, interchangeably it seems, the word abundance—which Cartier spells “habundance”¹⁸—and versions of the word fertility: for instance, Thevet seems to deem the adjective “fertile” too neutral, since he emphasizes it into “très fertile” – attached, in sixteenth-century French – to describe America: “Quant au territoire de toute l’Amérique, il est très fertile en arbres portans fruits excellens, mais sans labour ne semence.” [And as to the territory of all of America, it is very fertile in trees that carry excellent fruits, but

¹⁸ Cartier, Jacques, *Relations*, ed. Michel Bideaux, Montreal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1986, 169. For lack of an English translation, all translations of Cartier are mine.

without labor or seed.]¹⁹ In the case of Thevet, the affirmation of America's fertility is problematic because of his previous copious descriptions of some African regions, and of the Atlantic islands (Madeira, Canaries) or even of Madagascar. Reading the progression of the narrative from Gibraltar to the France Antarctique, it becomes obvious that the main problem of his *Singularitez* will be to distinguish Brazil as exceptional after describing all these islands, already discovered, already fertile but most importantly already possessed by another. In that case, the "tresfertile" could be interpreted as affirming America as more fertile than the rest. Therefore, Thevet's abundance is built progressively throughout the *Singularitez*, insofar as it does not merely start when the narrative reaches America.

On the other hand, Cartier's problem will be to build a fertile abundance out of Canada. As Nicolas Wey-Gomez argues in *The Tropics of Empire*, the south is where all the riches and marvelous descriptions of Marco Polo and others came from, in Asia. Wey Gomez makes a convincing argument for why Christopher Columbus sailed not only west—as most of the scholarship and popular culture has focused on for centuries—but also, and it is just as important, south; he calls it "Columbus's invention of the American tropics."²⁰ Columbus would have distinguished, like his political and geographical readings, between a "temperate" north (that of Europe) and a "hot" south. In comparison, Cartier's direction, decades later, is desperately too temperate and similar to Europe in climate. Columbus's instinct about the equator in his now-lost diary conveys that south was where the most precious possessions were to be found: "under the parallel of the

¹⁹ Thevet, André, *Le Brésil d'André Thevet: Les Singularités de la France Antarctique (1557)*, ed. Frank Lestringant, Paris: Chandeigne, 2011, 162. For lack of translation of the part of the *Singularités* that describes Brazil, all translations are mine.

²⁰ Nicolás Wey Gómez, *The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies*, xiv.

world more gold and things of value are found.”²¹ Temperate regions are therefore perceived as moderate – around the time of Cartier, the adjective *tempéré* can be found, apparently for the first time, referring to temperature and climate.²² It is then fair to assume that Francis 1st would have had little expectations for Canada itself to provide riches, and merely wished for Cartier to find a north-west passage to the Indies. Cartier’s dilemma, therefore, in the *Relations* is to infuse the northern land of Canada with as much fertility and abundance as possible, and even warmth, in order to suggest close proximity with the Indies.

As a result, none of these narratives has the undeniable superlativity of that of Columbus—defining superlativity as the rhetorical insistence on superiority and uniqueness. Their distinctive abundance is thus conveyed through progression and comparison. It is more tentative and hesitant. Whereas Columbus repeated “sin comparación,” Thevet and Cartier’s abundance is very much a comparative one, instead of superlative. The narratives need points of comparison. Its points of comparison are both explicit (France and his native region of Brittany, for Cartier) and implicit (the topos of discovery narratives revived by Columbus, for Thevet). As a result, the comparisons demonstrate the disorientation inherent to any narrative set in the New World.

Defining Abundance and Fertility in Renaissance France

The two defining concepts of Thevet and Cartier’s accounts are abundance and fertility, which certainly seem to be each other’s synonyms, in most definitions. In the etymology of *abondance*, from the Latin *abundantia*, there is a noticeable tension

²¹ Las Casas, *Historia*, I. 5.4.131 (1994, 2: 1038) cited by Wey Gómez, 40.

²² See the entry for “tempéré” in the *Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé*.

between a moderate meaning, that of *richesse* or, even smaller, *suffisance*—*suffisamment* [sufficiency] is one of the possible translations of the adverb *abunde*—and the excessive dimension of the word: Gaffiot’s Latin dictionary goes as far as to translate *abundantia* into the French *surabondance* [over-abundance]. Moreover, the verb *abundare* has as its first, literal meaning, *déborder* [overflow] and as its second, figurative one, the agricultural meaning of “to grow abundantly.” In the French definition, however, *abondance* is perhaps more figurative than *fertilité*, since the definition of the Trésor states “Ce qui est disponible en très grande quantité (ressources, richesses, choses nécessaires ou utiles à la vie, etc.)” [what is available in great quantities, resources, richness, necessary things],²³ while the definition of *fertilité* is “Qualité d’une terre fertile qui produit abondamment” [quality of a land that produces abundantly].²⁴ Moreover, both words figuratively suggest intellectual, rhetorical creativity, as proven by their almost interchangeable use in Terence Cave’s *The Cornucopian Text*.²⁵ The etymology of the Trésor definition of *abondance* specifies, however, that from the twelfth century on, the meaning has stabilized to a “quantité plus que suffisante de biens” [a more than sufficient quantity of goods]. In comparison, *fertilité* has less to do with excess, and instead is reserved for the quality of a land that produces well, that is fecund. In short, both words have different connotations, but are used interchangeably by Cartier and Thevet, and refer mostly, in the context of the New World, to an intrinsic quality of the land that produces

²³ In order for the close readings to make sense, all translations into English are my own, since available translations of Thevet and Cartier are not literal enough.

²⁴ All definitions in French comes from the *Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé*.

²⁵ Cave, *op. cit.*. In his Introduction, Cave places sexual fertility as one figure of abundance (xiii). In the rest of the book, however, when he talks of the fertility of speech (in a quote by Agricola, 15) and of its importance in the concept of *copia*, the distinction between abundance and fertility often ends up effectively blurred.

without human intervention. In fact, both authors associate *abondance* and *fertilité* to the notion of wilderness, of *sauvage*.

Numbers and Quantities

In terms of vocabulary, Thevet and Cartier, like Columbus, favor neutral, concise words such as “bon” and “beau”: the quality of the land mirrors its beauty. Yet in Cartier the first observation of Terre Neuve is one of quantity, first with the numerous blocks of ice, and soon with the great number of birds: “grant nombre de glasses qui estoient le long d’icelle terre.” [a great number of pieces of ice, that could be found along this land]²⁶ Thus, the first hyperbole in Cartier’s *Première relation* happens around the famous isle des Ouaiseaulx: “desqueulx y a si grant nombre, que c’est une chosse increable, qui ne la voyt; car nonobstant que ladite isle contienne environ une lieue de circumferance, en soit si très plaine qu’i semble que on les ayt arimez.” [of which there is such a great number that it is an incredible thing, for one who sees it; because despite being only one league of circumference, the island is so full of them [birds] that it seems that they were put there methodically.]²⁷ If Canada does not appear immediately as the fertile, lush *maravilla* that Columbus describes in his own first letter, Cartier conveys abundance through a different *merveille*—etymologically, from the Latin *mirabilia*, something that is admirable—the incredible number of birds, described as a Christian miracle: “chosse increable, qui ne la voyt” [an incredible thing, for one who sees it]. Moreover, the island is not simply full of these birds, it is so very full, “si très plaine.” The rest of the narrative sees the multiplication of quantities, with the adjective “plaine” qualifying many spaces, and the

²⁶ Cartier, *op. cit.*, 96.

²⁷ My translation: *arrimer* is a maritime term for putting a cargo in place methodically, so that it does not move in case of a tempest. See the entry in the *TLFi*.

adverb “force,” meaning plenty of: “Il y a force grouaiseliers, frassiers et rosses de Provins, persil et aultres bonnes herbes de grant odeur.” [There are plenty of red currant trees, strawberry plants, roses from Provins, parsely, and many other good herbs, of great fragrance]²⁸ One can already note how problematic it is for Cartier to recognize a plant that is precisely qualified by its provenance in the town of Provins, in France, where it was already well-known in the sixteenth-century because of its cultivation.

On the island of birds, furthermore, quantity, translated into fullness, large size, and even strength (the etymological meaning of “force”), reaches the bodies of the birds themselves: “et sont iceulx ouaiseaux si gras que c’est une chosse merveilleuse” [and these birds are so fat that it is a marvelous thing], with similar superlatives.²⁹ Size therefore becomes a defining criteria of the abundance of Canada, with animals seldom described without the attached adjectives “grant”, “gros”, or “gras”, regardless of redundancy: “Il lui y a entour icelle ille plusieurs grandes bestez, comme grans beuffz.” [There are, around this island, several great beasts, like big oxen]³⁰ The hyperbole of greatness, therefore, is often redundant, insofar as the mere visual description is given more weight by the quantitative action of counting and catching these animals: “la plus grande pescherie de grosses molues qui soit possible; desquelles mollues en prynmes, en attendant notre compaignon, *plus d’un cent, en moins d’un heure.*” [The largest fishery of great codfishes that was possible; of which we took, while we waited for our companion, more than a hundred in less than an hour]³¹

²⁸ Ibid., 105. “Rosses de Provins” is *rosa gallica officinalis*, a plant used for medicine, that Cartier probably recognizes by mistake. Olivier de Serres lists its uses and qualities in his *Théâtre d’Agriculture* in 1600.

²⁹ Ibid., 96.

³⁰ Ibid., 105.

³¹ Ibid., 103, my emphasis.

Because Thevet writes about *Singularitez* – that is to say, curiosities of the land, it seems evident that he may focus more on an abundance conveyed through what he calls, in his dedication to the Cardinal of Sens, the “diversité du naturel des animaux” [the diversity in the nature of the animals], that is to say, a variety of singular, exceptional things rather than a hyperbole of quantity, and the “température du ciel de la contrée,” [temperature of the sky in that land] which are the two main objects of admiration he designates.³² Yet on some occasions, the rhetoric of greatness surfaces as the narrative gets closer to America, for instance in Madagascar: “Au surplus, en cette même île se trouvent melons gros à merveille [...]” [Moreover, in the same island, there are melons that are marvelously big]³³ While the descriptions of the other regions and islands are concise and general, the chapters depicting the France Antarctique appear to be more precise, describing precise objects instead of lands. He goes on to describe a fruit that is “gros comme un oeuf d’autruche” [as big as an ostrich’s egg]³⁴ while another, the pineapple, is said to be “gros comme une moyenne citrouille.” [as big as a medium sized pumpkin]³⁵ Thevet repeats the word “abondance” in the phrase “abondance de” more than Cartier, who merely uses it once. He uses it, interchangeably, for vegetal as much as for precious, extractable goods: “Cette île porte mine d’or, gingembre, abondance de porcelaine blanche” [this island bears gold mines, ginger, an abundance of white porcelain],³⁶ and “Quant au plat pays, il est de présent fort beau par une infinité de jardinages, fontaines et rivières d’eau douce, auxquelles se trouve abondance de très bon

³² Thevet, *op. cit.*, (1878) XL.

³³ Ibid., 117.

³⁴ Ibid., 231.

³⁵ Ibid., 242.

³⁶ Ibid., 248.

poisson” [As to the flat land, it is presently very beautiful, from an infinity of gardens, fountains, and freshwater rivers, in which there is an abundance of very good fish],³⁷ where one finds the criteria of beauty (“fort beau”), blended with that of quantity, represented by abundance but also, a singularity of Thevet, “infinité.” Abundance is established as a finished but natural product, something one encounters, or even, that spontaneously appears, with the pronominal “se trouve” and “cette isle porte” in the previous quote. They conjure up, in this natural plenty, the absence of human transformation of these products, which the traveler discovers and finds suddenly. Simultaneously, Thevet’s abundance is less insistent than Cartier’s, but also goes further with the notion of an infinite quantity. Both authors also use plenty of lists in order to signify abundance.

Colonial Propaganda

Because the way that they describe the landscape of America could have a role in the growing power and opulence of the French kingdom, Thevet and Cartier’s narratives involve what one could identify as a consumerist sort of propaganda. The rhetoric sneaks up on the readers in a relatively subtle way, only to become explicit and redundant in the rest of the narrative. In her article on Marc Lescarbot, “Marc Lescarbot Reads Jacques Cartier: Colonial History in the Service of Propaganda,” Carla Zecher calls this process a “colonial propaganda.”³⁸ As she puts it, “During the reign of Henri IV, Brazil and Canada were in competition as potential sites for French expansion in the Americas, with the proponents of each locale vying for royal attention.” This corresponds seamlessly with

³⁷ Ibid., 281.

³⁸ Zecher, Carla, “Marc Lescarbot Reads Jacques Cartier: Colonial History in the Service of Propaganda,” in *L'Esprit Créateur* 48.1 (2008) 107-119.

what the reader can witness in both Cartier and Thevet. Zecker speaks of the colony in terms of consumption: she cites Lescarbot's text in an analogy between the colony itself and what settlers seek to market in the colony:

Tant de Memoires dispersés se perdent facilement, et ne peuvent resister au temps qui en fin consomme toute chose, s'ilz ne sont r'amassés à la façon de ces petits poissons qui se voyans exposés à toute sorte d'injure, et en proye à la gourmandise des plus grands, s'assemblent par milliers, et s'entrelassent en tant de pelotons, qu'ils se rendent assez forts pour se garentir de la gueule des coursaires.³⁹
[So many scattered memories get easily lost, and cannot resist time, which ultimately consumes every thing, if they are not amassed in the way of those little fishes that, seeing themselves exposed to all sorts of risk, and prey to the greed of the bigger fishes, assemble by thousands, and get interlaced in so many packs, that they make themselves strong enough to avoid the mouth of the mariners.]

Consumption features in various ways in the quote: in the analogy, the survival of the fittest, represented by the strategy of the fishes, is opposed to “la gueule des coursaires”, that is to say both the mouth and the belly of mariners – who are here compared to beasts. Moreover, the *topos* of a time that “consomme toute chose” strategically introduces the notion of consumption understood as a case of *vanitas* or *memento mori*, since it is associated with the notion of passing time. What the fishes strive to escape is “la gourmandise des plus grands,” a reformulation of the survival of the fittest, “la loi du plus fort,” into the context of consumption of the colony. It is, in fact, greed and gluttony that preside over the consideration of the American territory as a potential colony. On another level, the analogy works in a parallel between big and small, “petits poissons” and “des plus grands.” Indeed, abundance similarly has qualitative and quantitative dimensions. The colony, it seems, is characterized by this power relation – *la loi du plus fort* – and another rule, that of numbers. The colonial consumerism at play in those narratives is far

³⁹ Lescarbot, 5, in Zecker, followed by my translation.

from reaching a modern definition of consumerism, and yet, with its rhetorical modulations on various versions of consumption, it hints at already excessive greed and hunger, at a kind of violence. Even if Lescarbot merely operates an analogy between his object, memories, and small fishes waiting to be caught, the vivacity of the trope is undeniable.

In the case of Thevet, Frank Lestringant remarks that *démésure* (immoderation, excessiveness) rules the narrative, since the France Antarctique takes up a disproportionate importance, from the *Singularitez* to the gigantic *Cosmographie universelle*:

Au regard des dix semaines que Thevet a effectivement passées à Guanabara, le Brésil occupe dans son oeuvre une place démesurée. Non seulement les *Singularitez* de 1557 lui sont en majeure partie consacrées, mais la France Antarctique, officiellement perdue le 16 mars 1560, hante de ses rémanences nombreuses les quatre tomes de la *Cosmographie universelle*.⁴⁰
[Regarding the ten weeks that Thevet effectively spent in Guanabara, Brazil occupies a disproportionate place in his work. Not only are the *Singularities* of 1557 greatly dedicated to it, but France Antarctica, officially lost March 16, 1560, haunts the four volumes of the *Universal Cosmography* with its numerous remains.]

More than *démésure*, Thevet's rhetorics could be one of *surenchère*, especially in the context of colonial propaganda. The narrative only arrives at Brazil in chapter twenty-five, preceded by long descriptions of the islands encountered on the way, of their fauna and flora, and of reflections upon the inhabitability of the equatorial region, and on the diversity of fishes that evolve in the ocean near the equator. Thevet blatantly delays the arrival of his narrative to the region announced in the title, even accomplishing what modern day readers would recognize as a preview. In chapter twenty-two, describing

⁴⁰ Lestringant, Frank, *L'Atelier du cosmographe ou l'image du monde à la Renaissance*, 81 (my translation).

Bonne-Espérance [Cape of Good Hope], Thevet stages their arrival to America, in slow-motion:

“Approchant de notre Amérique bien cinquante lieues, commençâmes à sentir l’air de la terre, tout autre que celui de la marine, avec une odeur tant suave des arbres, herbes, fleurs, et fruits du pays, que jamais baume, fût-ce celui d’Egypte, ne sembla plus plaisant, ni de meilleure odeur.”⁴¹

[Approaching our America by fifty leagues, we began to smell the air of the land, very different from that of the sea, with such a sweet odor from the trees, herbs, flowers, and fruits of the land, that no balm, be it that of Egypt, could seem more pleasant, or fragrant.]

Describing the fragrance of the new land, Thevet fabricates a longing for the smell in the reader, a smell so evasive that it seems to encompass all the particular smells of all the *singularitez* of this land. One can also already notice the redundancy of the description, with the repetition of “odeur,” the gradation from a comparative form (“plus plaisant”) to a superlative form (“meilleure odeur”). Yet after this salivating preview, Thevet surprisingly takes the narrative away from America, and towards the island of Madagascar (in a quite opposite direction), in chapter twenty-three, also characterized, like all the islands encountered beforehand, by its abundance: “riche au surplus et fertile de tous biens, pour être merueilleusement bien située” [rich moreover and fertile of all goods, because it is marvelously well situated].⁴²

Cartier exhibits a very different travel writing, essentially commencing his narrative upon their arrival at Terre-Neuve, with a more neutral, much less ornate style. His own delaying, however, appears in the shape of deprecating comments on the land that he nevertheless wants to advertise. The way Cartier writes about the cold weather—they arrive to their destination on May 10th—betrays his surprise, perhaps even his

⁴¹ Thevet, *op. cit.*, 141.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 145.

disappointment, only once. The ice is first described matter-of-factly, although the immobilization of the expedition by the poor weather also comes through: “[...] et pour le grant nombre de glasses qui estoit le long d’icelle terre nous convint entrer dans un havre nommé Sainte Katherine [...] où fumes l’espace [de] dix jours attendant nostre temps et acoustrant noz barques.”⁴³ Several days later, on May 27th, a more emotional expression surfaces in a similar situation—the ice preventing the ship from approaching the location itself, and forcing them to sail to find a more hospitable harbor—demonstrating some degree of annoyance: “Le mercredi XXVIIe dudit mois nous arivames à l’entree de la baye des Chasteaux et pour la contrarieté du temps et du grant nombre de glaces que trouvasmes nous convint entrer dedans ung hable estant aux environs d’icelle entree [...] où nous fumes sans en povair sortir jucques au neuffiesme jour de juign [...].”⁴⁴ To a greater degree than in the case of St Catherine’s harbor, the present quote expresses the power of the weather to immobilize the expedition. While the first quote expressed patience without palpable frustration—“attendant nostre temps”—the second betrays just how uncooperative the weather of Canada is and a sense of discontent, with “la contrarieté”; indeed, Cartier could refer to the mere obstacle that this represents—from the Latin *contrarietas* for “opposition, choses contraires, contraste”—or, in a more demonstrative way, to how unexpectedly cold the place is even for the late Spring months—*contrariété*, in the Cotgrave dictionary, translates into, among other words, “mightie disagreement.” Ultimately, it is indeed a disagreement, a lack of understanding and cooperation, between the new land and the French explorer, that these

⁴³ Cartier, *op. cit.*, 96.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

lines illustrate, through words such as “contrariété” and phrases like “attendant nostre temps.” The new land appears at first undeniably inhospitable.

The island, moreover, can only be approached slowly, recalling the slow-motion of Thevet: “laquelle isle estoit toute avironnée et circuitte d’un bancq de glasses rompues et departies par pièces” [said island was all environed and circumscribed by a bank of ice, broken and separated in pieces].⁴⁵ He uses redundant forms more than repetition, with couples of words that seem to signify the very same ideas: “avironnée et circuitte” both point at a surrounding movement – with the root of *virer* meaning “to turn”⁴⁶ – while “rompues et departies” hint at the same idea of broken pieces, even adding, in a supplement to the logic of binaries, “par pièces.” Redundancy is perhaps the clearest sign of a style that either strives to appear more literary by adding excess material and words or betrays its own propagandistic aim. Indeed, the contrast with the rest of Cartier’s style is blatant: his maximum enthusiasm thus far has been illustrated by rare superlatives, and moderate adjectives such as *bon*, *beau* or *grand*. The sudden rhetorical *copia*, if it is not original in the sixteenth century, certainly seems discordant with the style of the rest of the *Relations*.

The olfactive description that can be observed in Thevet already exists in Cartier’s *Relations*, exclusively when it comes to fragrant, that is to say positive, pleasant smells. Odor usually comes to complement and complete a description of beauty or quantity: he describes trees, “quelx sont merveillesusement beaulx et de grande odeur.” [which are marvelously beautiful and of great odor]⁴⁷ In a list of fruits and cereals available in the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁶ See Karen Pinkus’s analysis of the origins of the word “environment” in her article “The Risks of Sustainability.”

⁴⁷ Cartier, *op. cit.*, 108.

Baie de Chaleur, he adds “aultres herbez de bonne et grande odeur.” [and other herbs, of good and great odor]⁴⁸ One can notice the peculiar blend of beauty, greatness and odor in this chiasmus organized around the conjunction “et.” Similarly, Cartier omits the olfactive descriptions in cases where it would come to stain an otherwise abundant, satisfactory description, notably in the case of island of birds – as one can assume that so many sea birds would have smelled unpleasantly. As Michel Bideaux notices it, the île des Oiseaux appears in 1555 in Guillaume Le Testu’s *Cosmographie Universelle* as the “île puante.”⁴⁹ It is therefore significant that, while Cartier shows a dedication to describing the odor of places, he fails to do so for the one island that plainly smells bad. This goes to demonstrate the undeniable propaganda at play in his *Relations*.

A Rhetoric of Satisfaction and Disappointment: from Comparative to Superlative

As previously discussed, Jacques Cartier’s adjectives are kept to a minimum, insofar as the main qualifying words that get iterated are *bon*, *grant*, or *belle* [good, great and beautiful], but they do appear in various comparative forms: “des ouaiseaulx, desqueulx y a *si grant* nombre [...]” [birds, of which there was a great number],⁵⁰ “la chair duquel estoit *aussi* bonne à mangier *comme* d’une génise de deux ans” [the flesh of which was as good to eat as that of a two-year-old heifer].⁵¹ The relative dearth and lack of variety of adjectives work towards an anticlimactic effect in most sentences, where the reader would arguably expect a more impressive description. Around the *hable de la Ballaine*, in the case of a “bonne ripviere plus grande, où il y a pluseurs saulmons” [a good and bigger river, where there are several salmons], it almost seems as if Cartier had

⁴⁸ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁵¹ Ibid., 5.

counted the salmons and there were not enough to call it a multitude.⁵² This is therefore quite different from the indisputable multitude of Columbus's first letter. In this rhetoric of disappointment, building up the suspense and then delivering anticlimatic formulas, there are also several cases of what I call failed superlatives, phrases that, grammatically, are constructed like superlatives, but without fully completing their potential. This partakes in the rhetorical inflation previously discussed: the syntax visibly strives to inflate the environment of the New World into an abundant and fertile land, but the words contradict the syntax, and deflate the overall effect. For instance, Cartier explains that he thinks la Ballaine to be "l'un des bons hables du monde" [one of the good harbors of the world], where he gives the impression of a superlative, and instead fails to deliver one – the correct form would indeed be "l'un des meilleurs hables du monde" [one of the best harbors in the world]. The result undeniably falls flat, and fails to deliver how impressive the harbor is. Cartier's failed superlatives are the ultimate symptom of his rhetorical approach to Canada: the descriptions do not have the vibrancy and liveliness of Columbus's, and yet the *Relations* are characterized by lukewarm rhetorical attempts at convincing potential readers of the opposite. Rhetorically at least, Canada does not reach the heights of expectations set by Columbus and others, or perhaps by Cartier himself.

Abundance is nevertheless still suggested in the background, in the midst of such mild excitement for the nature of Terre-Neuve, with tales of the "grant pescherie" of la Ballaine becoming in cap Royal "la plus grande pescherie de grosses molues qui soit possible" [the greatest catch of big cods that were possible].⁵³ This is the first movement

⁵² Ibid., 11.

⁵³ Ibid., 15.

of a systematic gradation in Cartier's *Relation* from the terrible Terre-Neuve, which he qualifies as being unworthy of the name *terre* and wants to rename instead "pierres et rochers effrables et mal rabottez" [dreadful and badly flattened stones and rocks], going as far as to call it "la terre que Dieu donna à Cayn" [the land that God gave to Cain], to Hochelaga.⁵⁴ In fact, one knows Cartier has reached a satisfying land when the qualifiers become fully satisfying themselves, with proper superlatives instead of failed ones, and the same redundancy that will become typical of the travel narratives to New France.

Thevet's abundance is also conveyed through lists such as "sucre, vin, miel, cire, oranges, citrons, limons, grenades, et cordouans" [sugar, wine, honey, wax, oranges, lemons, limes, pomegranates, and leather],⁵⁵ yet this particular, recognizable abundance of known fruits and marketable products is different from Cartier's description, that of wild bushes, flowers and herbs, compared and associated with those known in France and more particularly Brittany. Thevet's abundance is characteristic of the islands he visited before the France Antarctique, that of Madeira for instance: it is an agricultural abundance, having to do with the natural fertility of the land, but also with a cultivation of the land by human labor. Because Thevet has arguably spoiled the beauty and abundance, or at least the exceptional status of America with his already exalted representation of other lands on the way there, it is fair to observe that he resorts to other devices in order to convey the *singular* abundance of Brazil. Since he cannot rely on already-used names for the new natural objects that he encounters, he is forced to use a mixture of comparison to Old World nature, and plain wonder.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁵ Thevet, *op. cit.*, 35.

The Status of Wonder

In both narratives, a redundant word is “merveilleux,” even used as an adverb.

“Merveilleux,” in medieval French (around 1100, as the *Trésor de la Langue Française* indicates), meant “qui dépasse les limites ordinaires.” Rhetorically, it fits the needs of Cartier and Thevet’s assertions of abundance quite well, since it presupposes the usual conception of limits and the obsolescence of comparison. Precisely, the cluster of words to express the marvelous can also be found in the text that likely inspired both French explorers: the letter that Columbus writes to the Catholic Kings, previously cited. In his aptly-named book, *Marvelous Possessions*, Stephen Greenblatt defines a marvel as, precisely, “not simply the recognition of the unusual [...] but a certain excess, a hyperbolic intensity, a sense of awed delight.”⁵⁶ Inscribed in his definition is a positive connotation, further exposed in a close reading of Columbus’s letter:

The marvelous for Columbus usually involves then a surpassing of the measure but not in the direction of the monstrous or grotesque; rather, a heightening of impressions until they reach a kind of perfection. Española, he writes in the first letter, is ‘very fertile to a limitless degree’; its harbors are ‘beyond comparison with others which I know in Christendom,’ it has many good and large rivers ‘which is marvelous’ (que es maravilla); and its mountains are ‘beyond comparison with the island of Teneriffe’ (i.4).

Cartier and Thevet have a significantly different use of the concept, even though, arguably, they use it for the same reason, and in the same context, namely for colonial propaganda and rhetorical efficiency. They both use it often, although not always aptly.

Cartier repeats “à merveilles” about various objects, be it the green color of the land:

“belles prairyes et champaignes vertes à merveilles” [beautiful prairies and marvelously green fields] or the capacity of the natives to steal everything they can, “Ilz sont larrons à

⁵⁶ Greenblatt, Stephen, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 76.

merveilles de tout ce qu'ilz peuvent desrober" [They are marvelous thieves of anything they can steal].⁵⁷ For Thevet, "merveilleusement" is an extremely frequent adverb and also seems more ambivalent. For him, present-day Haiti is "merveilleusement riche en mines d'or, comme plusieurs autres de ce pays-là" [marvelously rich in gold mines, like many other islands in that country],⁵⁸ and he generously uses various forms of the word to describe all the places he stops at, not only America. Yet "merveilleux" is also something closer to a monstrous, strange thing: speaking of the Indians, he qualifies them as "gens merveilleusement estranges et sauvages" [marvelously strange and savage people].⁵⁹ In fact, he also uses it to qualify the extreme situation of Canada: "Cette région de Canada est merveilleusement sujette aux tremblemens de terre et aux grêles" [this region of Canada is marvelously subject to earthquakes and hail storms].⁶⁰ Here, notably, the marvelous extends into the realm of extrapolated imagination, as Lestringant indicates in a footnote that this is obviously incorrect, and that Thevet merely borrowed this fact from Olaus Magnus's *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*, meant to describe Iceland and Norway.⁶¹ He also deems Terre-Neuve to be "merveilleusement froide" [marvelously cold].⁶² Unlike Columbus, Cartier and Thevet also use the marvelous to give an exceptional dimension to a quality of the land that does not objectively serve their colonial propaganda. Moreover, for Thevet, the grammatical position of "merveilleux" or "merveilleusement" often proceeds in the same ambivalent rhetoric of satisfaction and disappointment as the failed superlatives. One expects a truly marvelous quality –

⁵⁷ Cartier, *op. cit.*, 116 and 118.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 353.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 162.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 392.

⁶¹ Ibid., 507.

⁶² Ibid., 396.

something to admire, the positive dimension of the term – but merely finds, instead, an excess of fearful things: the natives steal wonderfully, the water is marvelously cold. For Canada especially, it seems as if both texts disguised the unremarkable quality of the land—insofar as colonial endeavors are concerned, Canada has no gold, no exotic spice or objects, no rare or precious minerals—into an assertion of its remarkable uniqueness on any other level, the wonderful and the extra-ordinary.

A Cornucopian Paradise as Imaginative Compensation

Inscribed in the texts is the apparent need for the New World, whether Northern or Southern, to embody not only a cornucopia, but also an earthly paradise— this is also a characteristic of Columbus’s descriptions. The descriptions of Thevet and Cartier present a mixture of the Biblical garden of Eden and of the medieval land of Cockaigne. The reference to paradise is evidently not new, and by the time Thevet and Cartier write their own versions of the New World travel narratives, Columbus and Vespucci have already established the oneiric, paradisiac dimension of America. In *Dreaming of Cockaigne: Medieval Fantasies of the Perfect Life*, Herman Pleij exposes the common history of the notions of paradise and that of Cockaigne: “The countless portrayals of paradise dating from the Middle Ages display a tendency to spruce up the somewhat bare biblical paradise, inevitably lending it the character of a Cockaigne catering more to contemporary needs.”⁶³ In his words, the Middle Ages—and in many ways the Renaissance follows in its steps—has a need for a more promising biblical paradise, so the tales of Cockaigne nourish this need until both traditions get intertwined⁶⁴: the garden

⁶³ Pleij, Herman, *Dreaming of Cockaigne: Medieval Fantasies of the Perfect Life*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, 13

⁶⁴ For details on how the biblical garden of Eden became more of a luxurious paradise, see, for instance, *Green Imperialism*, where Richard H. Grove finds that Drake “makes a clear link

of Eden becomes greener, more fruitful, when originally there were merely a few trees, and one forbidden fruit. Abundance defines both representations of Cockaigne and reformulations of the biblical paradise, and the sixteenth century still very much lives under these images. Arguably, both visual traditions find the ideal place to collapse into with the travel narratives of the New World.⁶⁵

In order to engage a sixteenth-century audience, Cartier and Thevet therefore had to appeal to what Pleij calls “a real need felt by all segments of society for imaginative compensation.”⁶⁶ The concept of “imaginative compensation” is crucial to understanding the rhetoric of abundance and excess in both texts. First of all, in the New World paradises—the plural is necessary—, there is a diversity of food, in order to compensate for the monotonous diet of the lower sections of the population in Europe. European peasants would eat mainly meat, beans, and the vegetables they would consume were limited to turnip and onions. Indeed, while the Renaissance did see the introduction of vegetables into the menus, it was not in the common kitchen.⁶⁷ Thus, Thevet and Cartier represented exotic descriptions of plenty, originated in other, oriental travel narratives, but also in the diets of the European aristocracy. Indeed, the variety of vegetables and fruits, as it is hyperbolically represented by an artist like Arcimboldo—who introduced American *maize* [corn] in his *Vertumnus* in 1590 or 1591 – was only accessible to part of

between the restored Garden of Eden of the Renaissance botanical garden and the discovered Eden of the tropical island”, p. 40. Also, see Delumeau, Jean, *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*, New York: Continuum, 1995.

⁶⁵ Quite notably, Amerigo Vespucci, as Antonello Gerbi puts it, gets so “carried away by all the luxuriant vegetation, the perfumed air, the tastes of fruit and root that twice he says he feels he is in an Earthly Paradise or close to the Earthly Paradise”, 38.

⁶⁶ Pleij, *op. cit.*, 95.

⁶⁷ This overview of the common diet comes from Pleij, *op. cit.*, 92: peasants would have a limited diet, the staple of which was bread, and to which meat was added in the Renaissance.

the aristocracy.⁶⁸ Descriptions of fruits abound in Thevet, and are also frequent in Cartier.

The pineapple, which Thevet originally describes as a fruit that the natives use exclusively for medicine, is an example of the diversion of the medical function—which could justify its importation and cultivation in Europe—to the rhetorical construction of desire for the reader, through the redundancy of positive qualifiers:

“Le fruit duquel plus communement ils usent en leurs maladies, est nommé *nana*, gros comme une moyenne citrouille, fait tout autour comme une pomme de pin, [...]. Ce fruit devient iaune en maturité, lequel est merueilleusement excellent, tant pour sa douceur que saveur, autant amoureuse que fin sucre, et plus.”⁶⁹

[The fruit of which they commonly use for medicine, and is called *nana*, big like an average-sized pumpkin, made all-around like a pine cone. This fruit becomes yellow when mature, and is marvelously excellent, as much for its sweetness as for its taste, as loveable as fine sugar, and more.]

Thevet, in a defining feature of the travel narratives in America since Columbus, borrows comparisons with already recognizable elements from the Old World in order to build his portrait of the fruit: yet the images evoked are that of a pumpkin—a winter vegetable—and that of a non-comestible conifer cone—unsurprisingly, since that is where the English name of this fruit comes from. To this he adds a pleonastic formula,

“merveilleusement excellent,” immediately giving it the status of wonder. Comparison is the main tool of his narrative, with the rhyme *douceur* and *saveur*, and the list of comparative forms “tant pour sa...que” and “autant amoureuse que.” Perhaps the most surprising word is “amoureuse”: the word stands between a passive, medieval meaning of

⁶⁸ In the composite *Vertumnus*, part of the character’s hair is corn. For a description of the puns involved in the paintings, see Kaufman, Thomas Dacosta, *Arcimboldo: Visual Jokes, Natural History, and Still-Life Painting*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2009, 92. For an overview of the figures of speech and poetics in his paintings, see Barthes, Roland, “Arcimboldo, or Magician and rhétoriqueur” in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard, New York : Hill and Wang, 1985.

⁶⁹ Thevet, *op. cit.*, 242.

“loveable” and a contemporary meaning, “that inspires love” or “that is passionate.”⁷⁰

Thevet’s *Singularitez* thus appeal to curiosity but also taste, hunger and even sentimental or sensual elements. In *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism*, Chandra Mukerji establishes “the role played by Europe’s hedonistic culture of mass consumption in the social changes of the early modern period.”⁷¹ Thevet’s descriptions of his singularities certainly illustrate a hedonistic dimension to the appreciation of these potential objects of consumption.

In fact, there are moments in both Thevet and Cartier that could be coming from a typical representation of Cockaigne. In the *Deuxième relation*, Cartier describes the natives throwing corn bread at the European sailors: “Et nous apportèrent force poisson et de leur pain faict de groz mil qu’ilz gectoient dedans noz barques en sorte qu’il sembloyt qu’il tombast de l’ayr” [And they brought us plenty of fish and this bread that they make out of big millet, which they threw in our boats, so much that it seemed they were falling out of the sky].⁷² This episode occurs as they are approaching Hochelaga—one version of his Canadian paradise. The rhetoric of wonder is visible in that, even though the real explanation precedes the imagined one—that the natives are merely throwing the bread in the boats—, there is still a need to give another, mythical-sounding interpretation: that the bread is falling from the sky. Such an image is characteristic of Renaissance Cockaigne, for instance in Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s “Land of Cockaigne” (Het Luilekkerland), where there is a great amount of quiches on the rooftop of the house. As Pleij puts it, commenting on a medieval Cockaigne poem, “[...] everywhere there is food, everything

⁷⁰ The history of the meaning of the adjective *amoureux* is taken from the *Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales*.

⁷¹ Mukerji, Chandra, *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism*, 2.

⁷² Cartier, *op. cit.*, 150.

is made of food, and all these edibles even fall out of the sky right into one's mouth."⁷³

Thevet offers his readers a very similar image, with the oyster trees, where food similarly appears to fall out of the sky, without any efforts on the part of men:

En ce terroir autour du fleuve susnommé, se trouvent arbres et arbrisseaux
approchants de la mer, tous couverts et chargés d'huîtres haut et bas. Vous devez
entendre que quand la mer s'enfle, elle jette un flot assez loin en terre, deux fois
en vingt-quatre heures, et que l'eau couvre le plus souvent ces arbres et arbustes,
principalement les moins élevés. Lors ces huîtres, étant de soi aucunement
visqueuses, se prennent et lient contre les branches, mais en abondance incroyable
[...].⁷⁴

[In this *terroir* around the very river, there are trees and shrubs approaching the
sea, all covered and loaded with oysters up and down. You have to understand
that when the sea flows, and throws a tide quite far inland, twice in twenty-four
hours, and that the water covers most often these trees and shrubs, in particular
the least elevated. When these oysters, being in themselves somewhat viscous,
grab and link themselves to these branches, in an incredible abundance...]

The redundancy already observed above resurfaces, with “arbres et arbrisseaux” being slightly modified into “arbres et arbustes” in a *surenchère* of synonyms, also visible in “couverts et chargés.” Moreover, there is a liveliness – or even, with Jane Bennett, a vibrancy – of the trees, and of oysters, representing them as in movement: the trees “approchants de la mer” imply that they advance on their own towards the sea, the verb *approcher* always suggesting a movement before a location. The use of a pronominal verb for the oysters who “se prennent et lient” in the trees also connote a reflexivity that nonhuman objects are not supposed to have, which results in a grammatical personification. Just like in a Cockaigne, the Indians simply need to wait until the sea has done its daily movement, twice a day in fact, to merely glean the incredible abundance of oysters. In both Cartier and Thevet's Cockaigne moments, the land provides food, whether by itself, or with the intermediary of the natives (for Cartier)—one would indeed

⁷³ Pleij, *op. cit.*, 90.

⁷⁴ Thevet, *op. cit.*, 160.

have to note, however, that the natives somehow seem to constitute part of the environment in those cases, and that their generosity is merely added on to the general abundance and exceptionality of the land.

The Leaves are Greener

Antonello Gerbi, in *Nature in the New World*, explains that ever since Columbus, the New World was characterized by the following contrast: when he has just arrived in Hispaniola, “Two days later, noting the splendor of the fresh green vegetation, like Castile in April or May (14 October), Columbus settles on the contrast-meager fauna, exuberant flora—that is to be repeated down through the centuries.”⁷⁵ Thus, the New World comes to embody earthly paradise and in this way replace the notion that such a paradise would be located in the East.⁷⁶ Few animals, but an overbearing vegetation, with the omnipresent shades of green, form the common representation of the Garden of Eden at the time, and, arguably, ever since. Yet the idea of a garden contradicts that of wilderness. What matters here is that, without the risk and danger of prey animals, the New World Thevet and Cartier represent seems to be quite a safe land—with only weak natives to deal with. And it is not only the color green, but all the others, that appear intensified. Describing the toucan, Thevet exclaims that “n’est possible trouver jaune plus excellent que celui de cet oiseau” [It is not possible to find a more excellent yellow than

⁷⁵ Gerbi, Antonello, *Nature in the New World: From Christopher Columbus to Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo*, Pittsburgh, Pa. : University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985, 15

⁷⁶ *Genesis* states, in two versions at least, that God “planted a garden eastward in Eden”. For more details, see Scafi, Alessandro, “Mapping Eden : Cartographies of the Earthly Paradise” in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. The notion is widely accepted in the Middle-Ages, notably in John Mandeville’s *Travels*, and is visible in maps as early as the 8th or 9th century. On the Hereford mappa mundi, Eden is a circular island located at the extreme eastern point of the map. As Scafi puts it, however, paradise was “usually, not consistently, placed in the East.” (65).

that of this bird].⁷⁷ The tools of description, whether in Cartier or Thevet, always tend to resort to categorizing each quality into degrees, and to place the object they describe into the higher degrees, as is the case here with the color yellow; otherwise, it would not make sense to describe this yellow as “excellent,” a color having various expressions and depths to it. “Excellent,” here, has more to do with an authoritative assertion of the superlativity of this color than a precise description: is it more vibrant? Sharper? Is it a different yellow than the usual conception of yellow? Something similar happens, in Thevet still, to the blue of the *carinde*’s feathers [the bird is a blue and yellow macaw]: “et son plumage, depuis le ventre jusques au gosier, est jaune comme fin or; les ailes et la queue, laquelle il a fort longue, sont de couleur de fin azur.” [and its feathers from the stomach to the throat are yellow like fine gold: the ears and the tail, which is very long, are the color of fine azure.]⁷⁸ Moreover, one of the main commodities from France Antarctique, the Brazilwood, “bois du brésil,” is a dying pigment for the color red. It was particularly precious and rare in the Renaissance, and was used to manufacture luxury textiles such as velvet. In his book *What Color is the Sacred*, exposing the relationship between vivid colors and exotic places in the Western imagination, Michael Taussig quotes François Delamare and Bernard Guineau, two experts on dyes and pigments who write that “[t]he “rarest, most precious colors have always been imported from exotic places.”⁷⁹ Hence, colors are another aspect on which Thevet insists on the exceptionality of the New World. Through these colors and the representation of a spontaneous, proliferating nature, Cartier and Thevet establish the New World as a vibrant and vivid

⁷⁷ Thevet, *op. cit.*, 246.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁷⁹ Taussig, Michael, *What Color is the Sacred*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, 4.

environment, where the explorer and potential settler is a passive observer who waits for the land to act upon itself, to provide food, to amaze.

Cartier's impression of Canada, on the other hand, is also vivid, although significantly less exotic in impression, with the overwhelming green of the trees and of the fields, punctuated by the occasional but redundant white and red of berries: "grouaiseliens blans et rouges, frassez, franbouaysses et roses rouges."⁸⁰ None of this is strikingly different than what is to be found in any French landscape. Cartier cannot assert the exotic dimension of Canada, so he resorts to naming colors and thus painting a picture of an idyllic nature. All that seems to interest Cartier is the quantity of forests and the flatness of the land, probably because it supposes the possibility of an agriculture and the necessary material to build boats; it signifies a possible sustenance. Yet, as Michel Bideaux puts it, Cartier also misreads the landscape since these "belles prairies et champagnes vertes à merveilles" [beautiful prairies and fields marvelously green] actually dissimulate an infertile soil, constituted mainly of sand.⁸¹ The text merely suggests the possibility of sustenance, a necessary manoeuvre for a land, the colonization of which Francis 1st considers. Hence, while both texts strive to assert the abundance of the New World, they also fall into two extremities: on the one hand, with Thevet, the narrative has little to do with plain sustenance and more to do with exotic goods and the paradisiac qualities of the land, on the other, with Cartier, the narrative's default is to assert that sustenance is possible.

Imagining Paradise out of Nada: Stadaconé

⁸⁰ Cartier, *op. cit.*, 34.

⁸¹ Ibid., 118 for the quote, 34 for Bideaux's commentary.

In this way, Cartier's paradise is undeniably less evident than that of Thevet: it is much too similar to France, and does not have any precious or exotic goods that could be marketable. Yet Cartier manages to convey the singularity of Canada by using a more quantifiable and comprehensible approach, or, in other words, by appealing to reason instead of senses, like Thevet arguably does. Indeed, Cartier seems mostly preoccupied with his own credibility—another of Columbus's concerns.⁸² By writing a travel narrative, Cartier attempts to assert, simultaneously, the necessity to colonize the new land, and his own capacity as a navigator and explorer, worthy of the favor of the king. As it has been noted above, instead of simply recounting the wonderful diversity of birds on the *île des Oiseaux*, which would amount to using wonder as an authority, Cartier gives criteria and measurements, namely, the number of boats they could have filled up in a given time:⁸³

“Nous noumons iceulx ouaiseaulz apponatz desqueulx noz deux barques en chargèrent, en moins de demye heure, comme de pierres, dont chaincun de noz navires en sallèrent quatre ou cinq pippes, sans ce que nous en peumes mangier de froyes.”

[We named these birds apponatz [great auks] of which we loaded our two boats, in less than a half hour, as if they were mere stones, of which each of our vessels salted four or five *pippes*, without even having been able to taste them fresh.]⁸⁴

Or, again, the quantitative “L'on y eust chargé en une heure trante icelles barques.” [We would have loaded, in an hour, thirty of these boats].⁸⁵

⁸² As Cecil Jane argues efficiently in his Introduction to *The Four Voyages of Columbus*, “It would not have been necessary for Columbus to insist, as he does insist with almost wearisome iteration of his extant writings, upon the justice of his claim and the magnitude of his services, had not that claim been seriously challenged and had not those services been seriously belittled” (xvii).

⁸³ See Cartier, *op. cit.*, 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 96.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 105.

Yet, in the dedication of his second relation to the King, presenting the same island, his formulation becomes significantly less concerned with truth and factual evidence, and much more exaggerated in nature: “laquelle ysle est si tres pleine d’oyseaulx que tous les navires de France y pourroient facilement charger sans que on n’apperceust que l’on en eust tiré” [said island is so very filled with birds that all the French ships could be loaded without it being noticed.]⁸⁶ The island is perhaps the only true description of plenty in the *Relations*. Posterior ones will be plentiful only in potentiality, having to do with the labor of agriculture, combined with the fertility of the land. It is the first island that they explore; Cartier may still be hoping that Canada will reveal itself to be a fruitful enterprise, a fertile land. All he finds, instead, are trees and fruits that he merely names like those of France, without even resorting to comparison most of the time. What motivates the second voyage, therefore, is not the fertility of the land explored, but the possibility of a passage to the Orient, the real paradise.

Significantly, Cartier occasionally lapses into a dream of exotic Orient in actual Canada, as if the Orient were his only point of reference, with improbable comparisons:

“Stadaconé qui est aussi bonne terre qu’il soit possible de veoir et bien fructifferante plaine de beaulx arbres de la nature et sorte de France, savoir chaisnes hourmes frennes noyers pruniers yfs seddrez vignes aubespines qui portent fruict aussi groz que prunes de Damas et aultres arbres soubz lesquelz croist de aussi bon chanvre que celluy de france lequel vient sans semance ny labour.”⁸⁷

[Stadaconé, which is just as good a land as is possible to be seen, and very fructifying land of beautiful trees of the nature and species of France, that is to say oaks, elms, ashes, black walnuts, plum trees, yews, cedars, vines, and hawthorns that bear a fruit as big as Damas plums, and other trees under which grows just as good hemp as that of France, which comes without sewing or labor]

⁸⁶ Ibid., 129.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 138-9.

With this description, Cartier establishes that Canada is close to France in the sense that similar trees grow in abundance – the list is after all lengthy, implying the fertile diversity of the land. Yet he claims the earth to be “bien fructiferrante” [productive of fruits] when, in fact, the only product per-se, apart from trees, is a fruit that he compares to “prunes de Damas,” a very exotic, oriental commodity. Moreover, he omits any consideration of whether the fruit is comestible or not. He seems more concerned with proving that Canada is productively close to the Orient, since he is after all mainly looking for a passage to the East. On the contrary to Columbus, who deems Española incomparable, Cartier needs the comparison with France, in order to assert the abundance of Canada.

From Comparative to Superlative

At some point, progressively, the dream of a passage to the Orient morphs into the search for a new paradise, one announced by the natives encountered. Indeed, the natives always seem to point further down the river when asked where all their riches are. Of course, it is unlikely that, with only an approximate sign language, natives understood quite what Cartier’s men were asking, just like it is unlikely that the latter understood what the natives were pointing at, exactly. Saguenay is Cartier’s lost paradise. As they assume they are approaching the promised land, the descriptions of Saguenay become even more abundant and superlative. At the end of the first *Relation*, Stadaconé is “aussi bonne terre qu’il soit possible de veoir” [as good a land as can be seen]⁸⁸ but in the second *Relation* it becomes, on both side of the river “les plus belles et meilleures terres qu’il soyt possible de veoyr aussi unyes que l’eau plaines des beaulx arbres du monde [...]” [the best and greatest lands that can be seen as unified as water and filled with some

⁸⁸ Ibid., 138.

beautiful trees of the world]⁸⁹ or, even further down “des plus belles terres du monde plaines de chaisnes aussi beaulx qu’il ait en forest de France soubz lesquelles estoit la terre couverte de glan” [some most beautiful lands of the world, filled with oaks as beautiful as in any French forest, under which the ground is covered with acorns.]⁹⁰ The *comparatif d’égalité*, “aussi bonne que,” becomes an undeniable, stronger superlative. Furthermore, Cartier’s paradise is associated with a perception of beauty, a criterium that is given even more weight than in Thevet’s narrative – where it seems to be limited to descriptions of beautiful birds like colorful parrots.⁹¹

However, Cartier’s text does not assert the superiority of the new land: he merely measures it up to other lands, the superiority of which is presupposed by the text. Those are, namely, France (particularly his native Brittany), the Orient (with the *prunes de Damas*) and even Brazil: “commança mes à trouver les terres labourees et belles grandes champagnes plaine de blez de leur terre le quel est comme mil de Brazil aussi groz ou plus que poix duquel vient ainsi que nous faisons du froument” [we started to find labored land and beautiful big countryside full of wheat from their land, which is like Brazil corn, as big as or bigger than the pea of which we make wheat flour]. Reaching Hochelaga – the future Montreal – the text also concludes on a climax of abundance, as if Hochelaga was confused with or collapsed into Saguenay: “Entre lesquelles montaignes est la terre la plus belle qu’il soit possible de veoyr labourable unye et plaine” [Among which mountains the earth is more beautiful than it is possible to see, a unified and flat

⁸⁹ Ibid., 146.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 151.

⁹¹ After all, in the description of Eden from Genesis, beauty and food are the most important criteria in the growing of trees: “And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.” 2.8-10

cropland].⁹² The narrative always hesitates between affirming the superlativity of Canada and the more realistic *comparatif d'égalité*, between hyperbole and credibility.

Saguenay: The Evading Paradise

The first mention of Saguenay comes in the first chapter of the *Deuxième relation*. Cartier relates the cartographic details that were given to the French sailors by the two “sauvaiges” that they had “taken” [“prins”] during the first voyage, among them “le royaume de Saguenay.” Saguenay, Bideaux writes, “au fil de la relation, assurera progressivement la fonction d’un Eldorado.”⁹³ At that time, Cartier only mentions Saguenay for it is said to have “cuyvre rouge”, the first potential precious cargo of Canada. Later in that relation, it takes on its full form of El Dorado, “Et nous ont faict entendre que oudict lieu les gens sont vestuz et habillez de draps comme nous et y a force villes et peuples et bonnes gens et qu’ilz ont grande quantité d’or et cuyvre rouge.”⁹⁴ Already, the characteristic of Saguenay is to be always talked about and heard of, always by the natives, and perhaps never found.

At the end of the second *Relation*, however, Cartier has not reached Saguenay, but the descriptions of it, from vague and faraway, get closer and come into focus. When the natives travel to Saguenay, “et s’en vont en beaulx champs vers plains de beaulx arbres fleurs et fruitz sumptueux” [and continue in beautiful fields towards several beautiful trees, flowers and sumptuous fruits],⁹⁵ it does appear to be a garden of Eden, especially with the mention of flowers, otherwise absent from Cartier’s narrative. More details emerge further down, creating out of Saguenay a true Oriental paradise, the description of

⁹² Cartier, *op. cit.*, 156.

⁹³ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 168.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 160.

which recalls the cultivated, commoditized islands of the Atlantic, the purpose of which was to cultivate fruits that were more difficult to grow in Europe⁹⁶: “et que en icelle terre y a oranges almen des noix prunes et aultres sortes de fructz en grand habundance” [and in said land there are oranges almonds nuts plums and other types of fruits in great abundance].⁹⁷ In this way, Saguenay is a Cockaigne by definition: “Nowhere are weeds to be seen, nor unclean animals such as worms and toads. Moreover, the most beautiful flowers and herbs grow everywhere, while the fruit is always ripe and everything blossoms forever.”⁹⁸ This leaves Saguenay in a still vague position: is it indeed cultivated and made profitable by the natives, or is it a natural, wild paradise where the fruits grow of their own volition? Exposing his mission for the third voyage in the next *Relation*, Cartier hopes to “reconnaître le pays de Saguenay, dont les habitants amenés par Cartier indiquèrent au roi, comment a été dit, que s’y trouvaient de grandes richesses et de très bonnes terres” [to recognize the land of Saguenay, whose inhabitants brought by Cartier indicated to the king that there were great treasures and very good land to be found].⁹⁹

Saguenay will evidently never be found, and as such does constitute the French El Dorado. It functions as a Cockaigne even in its development: first evoked by the two natives on the trip back from France after the first voyage, Saguenay evolved from an extremely fertile land—a merely agricultural or botanic notion—to one that overflowed with gold and precious materials—a distinctively more financial notion having to do with

⁹⁶ Describing the Canary islands, Thevet writes: “considéré qu’elles sont merueilleusement fertiles, servant à present de grenier et cave aux Espagnols”, p. 46.

In *Green Imperialism*, Grove identifies in Madeira and the Canary islands as “European plantations agriculture” that originated, as a matter of fact, as early as 1300, extensive descriptions of “the damaging ecological effects of deforestation”, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Cartier, *op. cit.*, 169.

⁹⁸ Pleij, *op. cit.*, 16.

⁹⁹ Cartier, *op. cit.*, 194.

the greed of Europeans. Just like the search for spices in Columbus's first trip led to the El Dorado and the frantic quest for gold, Saguenay follows the same evolution. A convenient escape for the natives, who were able to send the Europeans always further down the river, Saguenay actually never existed in native culture, neither as a kingdom nor as a myth, as investigations have proven.¹⁰⁰ If the expected arrival in Saguenay was conceived as the climax of each *Relations*, starting with the second, it logically follows that the whole impression of Cartier's compiled accounts is one of failed superlativity, or of an empty rhetoric.

Sauvage Fertility and the Issue of Labor

Cartier and Thevet do recognize some Old World crops in the New, sometimes vaguely, and use comparisons profusely to throw together a description of a *curiosité* that is a *bricolage* of several known natural objects. In that sense, they merely reproduce a familiar nature, multiplied in profusion. In the fertility of Cape of Orleans, Cartier describes trees that are “merveilleusement beaux et de grande odeur, et trouvasmes que c'estoient cedres, iffz pins, ormes blans, frainnes, sauldres, et aultres pluseurs à nous incongneuz, touz arbres sans fruitz” [marvelously beautiful and of great odor, and we found that they were cedars, yews, pine trees, white elms, ashes, and others that were unknown to us, all trees without fruits].¹⁰¹ Trees are the one common element that signifies luxurious fertility, both in Canada and in the jungle Thevet encounters in Brazil. It is the common denominator of the wilderness of a land that differs greatly from that of France.

¹⁰⁰ For a detailed overview of the apparition, golden age and disappearance of Saguenay, see King, Joseph Edward, “The Glorious Kingdom of Saguenay”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. XXXI, no. 4, Dec., 1950.

¹⁰¹ Cartier, *op. cit.*, 25.

The construction of fertility, therefore, owes as much to the genre of marvels as to poetic license. Cartier demonstrates a fascinating ambivalence towards the notions of fertility and wilderness: he is amazed to discover, for instance, the unexpected fertility of rocks and stones, when, complaining about the absence of *terre* in these “hautes montaignes de pierre nue,” he notices:

Ce nonobstant y croist grande quantité d’arbres et de plusieurs sortes qui croissent sus ladite pierre nue comme sus bonne terre de sorte que y avons veu tel arbre suffisant à master navire de trente thonneaulx aussi vert qu’il soit possible lequel estoit sus un rocq sans y avoir aucune saveur de terre.¹⁰²

[Yet there grows a quantity of trees and of several species that grow on said naked stone just as if it were good earth, so much so that we have seen one tree sufficient for masting a ship of thirty barrels, as green as was possible, which was on a stone that did not have any trace of earth.]

The passage is rich in interpretations: fertility is here not a quality of the earth or of stone, but rather, a self-generating quality of the plant itself, or, in this case, trees. Such a quality can easily be compared with the self-proliferating capacity of speech in Terence Cave’s *The Cornucopian Text*, or to the generative suggestiveness of the sculptures and ornaments in the Galerie François Ier in Fontainebleau, as Rebecca Zorach describes it in *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold*: “The gallery brings together, literally or metaphorically, the fruits of agricultural production and of bodies, of learning and of conquest.”¹⁰³ Cartier suggests that despite the lack of earth – that is to say, soil – that he deplored in the *Première relation*, the stony land could be utilized in some sense. He even commodifies his observation immediately, by suggesting, in the manner of an analogy, that these trees that spontaneously grow out of stones could be used to “master navire,” the very commercial purpose that is needed in a land considered for settlement. More importantly, even, by

¹⁰² Ibid., 135.

¹⁰³ Zorach, *op. cit.*, 38.

using a comparison, he suggests that the rocky soil [“*pierre nue*”] is indeed “*bonne terre*,” implying in this way that the land is fertile even when it appears to be a wasteland.

Comparisons allow Cartier to suggest fertility instead of asserting it, in a text where assertiveness is rendered impossible by the ambivalence of the land.

Criteria for the wild

Conceptually, one key aspect of abundance and fertility alike is the fact that they refuse the notion of any labor on the land. As Rebecca Zorach establishes in her analysis of the feminine representation of a fertile nature: “The focus on the woman’s body as limitless source both effaces her own labor and that of agricultural workers in general in the production of national wealth.”¹⁰⁴ Fertility and abundance tend to erase or disguise the actual labor required by any land to yield crops, a notable characteristic of Cockaigne unsurprisingly translated into the almost-marvelous tales of explorers in the New World. Indeed, a modern conception of labor implies, with John Locke, that labor should be visible on the land, for it asserts the property of one particular individual or group over that land.¹⁰⁵ The implication, therefore, is that a naturally abundant land suggests it does not yet belong to anybody: if the natives do not visibly impact their environment, the Europeans would be justified in their conquest of it.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 88.

¹⁰⁵ See John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*, chapter V, paragraph 26, in Locke, John, *Two Treatises of Government*, Indianapolis : Focus, 2016: “And though all the fruits it naturally produces, and beasts it feeds, belong to mankind in common, as they are produced by the spontaneous hand of nature; and no body has originally a private dominion, exclusive of the rest of mankind, in any of them, as they are thus in their natural state: yet being given for the use of men, there must of necessity be *a means to appropriate* them some way or other, before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial to any particular man. The fruit, or venison, which nourishes the wild Indian, who knows no enclosure, and is still a tenant in common, must be his, and so his, i.e. a part of him, that another can no longer have any right to it, before it can do him any good for the support of his life.”

Cartier makes numerous assumptions about whether the products of the land grow in the wild, or if they are a result of the labor of the natives. In the *Première relation*, he assumes that there is no labor at all visible in the land, since the wild is predominant. One of the reasons for this could be that they only encounter indigenous populations towards the end of the first voyage. It would therefore be logical to assume that everything grows in the wild—even though Cartier, a seasoned sailor, who likely had been traveling to Newfoundland for years, undoubtedly already knew what the natives looked like, and could have traded with some of them. Nonetheless, in Cartier's words, Canada does not necessarily always *look* wild:

Nous la trouvasmes plaine de beaulx arbres, prairies, champs de blé sauvage¹⁰⁶, et de poys en fleurs, aussi espes et aussi beaulx que je vis oncques en Bretagne, qu'ils sembloient y avoir esté semer par laboureaux.¹⁰⁷
[We found it full of beautiful trees, pastures, fields of wild wheat, and blossoming peas, as thick and beautiful as those I once saw in Brittany, which looked like they had been sown by a plowman]

The quote reveals several of the criteria of the wilderness that is constructed by Cartier. The island is full (*plaine*), one symptom of an extreme, wild fertility. Wheat is the principal cereal cultivated in the Old World and the ingredient of a staple food, bread. Its lack of success in the New World – Spaniards planted it almost immediately in Española, with poor results – is one of the main problems of colonization of America.¹⁰⁸ Without it,

¹⁰⁶ James Phinney Baxter explains that what Cartier takes to be wild wheat is actually wild oats. In Baxter, James Phinney, *A Memoir of Jacques Cartier*, New York : Dodd, Mead & Co, 1906, p. 94.

¹⁰⁷ Cartier, *op. cit.*, 19.

¹⁰⁸ These are the details given by Alfred W. Crosby in *The Columbian Exchange*: “Old World plants and animals obviously did not always precede the explorers and conquistadors (although sometimes this was the case), and there are wide stretches of the Americas where the European fauna and flora did not and do not prosper. The colonists, particularly the early ones and those in the hot, wet areas, had to accept many items of the Indian diet. To Europeans wheat bread was probably the most indispensable of diet, but the grains of Europe would not grow in climates where even the wafers used in the mass “did bend like to wet paper, by reason of the extreme

Europeans cannot make bread, which means they lack the very staple of their diet, but also the necessary means of their religious practice – together with wine. That it could grow spontaneously, “sauvaige”[wild] in Canada, is an attractive idea, although ultimately erroneous. Even more striking, one finds the *comparatif d’égalité* completed by a curious formula: for Cartier, the criteria for exceptional fertility is that it looks as if – and it is important here that he chooses to modulate this affirmation with the verb *sembler* – they had been sown by human labor. This is far from being a single occurrence, and constitutes, in fact, a constant criterion for Cartier. In the cape of Orleans, “Les terres où il n’y a bouays, sont fors belles et toutes plaines de poys, grouaiseliens blans et rouges, frasses, franboysses et blé sauvaige, comme seille; *quel il semble y abvoir esté semé et labouré*” [The land where there is no forest are very beautiful and filled with peas, red and white currant bushes, strawberries, raspberries and wild wheat, like rye; which seems to have been sown and labored].¹⁰⁹ One finds, once more, beauty and fullness, together with the “blé sauvaige,” which this time is vaguer, as if Cartier had realized it was not actually wheat, since he adds a comparison, “comme seille.” Again, nevertheless, the phrase, blending a conditional “seem” with the coupling of sowing and laboring on the land, closes the description. While the two phrases quoted above are in the passive voice, the next occurrence features a general, imprecise “on”: “et poys aussi espez comme si on les y abvoict semez et labourez.” [and peas, as thick as if someone had sown and labored them]¹¹⁰ Curiously, the “on” appears after Cartier introduces the reader – and is

humidity and heat.” Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon wrote of Río de Janeiro that it was necessary to eat “foods entirely different from those of our Europe” (65).

¹⁰⁹ Cartier, *op. cit.*, 25.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 34.

introduced himself – to the “sauvages nomades” [indigenous nomads] that live in the area. The passive voice of labor is a surprising aspect of Cartier’s *Relations*.

Labor as an Admirable Quality of the Land: Hochelaga

It is unclear whether Cartier implies, through the suggestion of labor explained above, that the land is already owned by the natives or that the abundance and fertility is so marvelous that it looks as if it had been done at the hands of humans. Logically, it could mean that he thinks there is a chance this particular land has been cultivated. Yet his insistence on the formula seems to point, rather, at a compliment to the fertility and wilderness of this land, which constitutes a strange paradox. When he repeats “comme si” [as if] and “il semble” [it seems], he sounds like he could be convinced that such a thing is impossible, and that this phrase will add to the wonders of the text. This changes in the *Deuxième relation*, where the conditional dimension of these formulas disappears for a preferred affirmation. This time, he appears certain that there has been no labor involved in the surrounding fertility: in the description that features “prunes de Damas,” he adds “et aultres arbres soubz lesquelz croist de aussi bon chanvre que celluy de france lequel vient sans semance ny labour” [and other trees under which grows as good hemp as that of France, which comes without sowing or labor].¹¹¹ Once more, this affirmation comes after his encounter with indigenous people, this time not deemed nomads but “gens demourant” [settled people], who gift the explorers with fish and “gros mil,” the same “big” corn that, it has been found, was cultivated in Canada just like in the rest of America.¹¹² Ironically, too, Cartier declares this just as he is getting closer to cultivated

¹¹¹ Ibid., 138.

¹¹² In Baxter’s *Memoir of Jacques Cartier*, at this particular mention of “gros mil,” he writes, in a footnote, “The “great millet” was, of course, maize.” (144).

land – that is, a land that he will recognize as such – in which the natives cultivate corn. Hochelaga, modern Montreal, is a mountain, “labouree et fort fertile” [labored and very fertile]. Cartier’s opinion on whether a plant grows with or without labor therefore seems questionable at best; his ambivalence demonstrates, as usual, the tension between providing a truthful account and the necessity for the account to be attractive. Overall, a land that shows traces of agriculture, at this point in the *Relations*, is placed in higher value than full wilderness, perhaps because the latter is associated with chaos and danger.

Labored is Better

Wilderness, arguably, blinds Cartier into admiring, instead of the agricultural labor of the natives, the natural productivity of the land. Does he render the natives invisible in his text, or does he simply refuse or fail to see the trace of their labor in all these fields that seem to be sowed by a human hand?

In the *Deuxième relation*, he is amazed at his discovery of wild vines along the river: “tant de vygnes chargees de raisins le long dudit fleuve qu’il semble myeulx qu’elles ayent esté plantees de main d’homme que aultrement; mays pour ce qu’elles ne sont cultivees ny taillees ne sont lesdits raisins si doux ni si groz comme les nostre” [so many vines loaded with grapes along the said river that it seems they would have been planted by a human hand than otherwise; but for they are neither harvested nor trimmed, said grapes are neither as sweet nor as big as ours].¹¹³ Curiously – although not so much so if one considers he probably was inspired from Cartier’s second and third relation in his descriptions of Canada – Thevet describes similar vines and grapes in his own

¹¹³ Cartier, *op. cit.*, 146.

chapters on Canada.¹¹⁴ Where Thevet, however, merely finds them to be “gros, bien nourris, et très bons à manger” [big, well nourished, and very good to eat]¹¹⁵ Cartier, on the other hand, gives an ambivalent account. The quality of looking like it has been cultivated apparently translates into a criterion of aesthetic appreciation for the wild. Cartier again gives agricultural labor a higher value in this passage: he explains that the grapes are not as big nor as sweet as in France, because they are not given proper care. If human labor is what gives better taste and a better—which is to say, bigger—size to cultivated fruits, plants and vegetables, one must wonder what Cartier’s implications are. Does he aim to demean the role of the natives in order to facilitate a potential conquest or colonization? Perhaps, and given Locke’s theory a century later, it would inscribe the text in the topos of wilderness and fertility. For the current study, however, it is perhaps more important to notice the paradox: even though agriculture does justify the possession of the land, and gives a vocation to human beings, Cartier operates a curious idealization of artificiality in the midst of a discovery account supposed to assert abundance and fertility.

Labor and Environmental Impact: A Conclusion

The willingness to refuse to see that there is indeed an indigenous agriculture seems to be a fascinating characteristic of New World narratives, and was arguably inaugurated by Columbus and Peter Martyr—it is the argument of Charles C. Mann in *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*.¹¹⁶ On the contrary,

¹¹⁴ In *Sous la leçon des vents*, Frank Lestringant relates that Thevet claimed to have met Cartier at his house in St Malo, “et il a peut-être recueilli de lui des mémoires manuscrits.” See Lestringant, Frank, *Sous la leçon des vents: le monde d’André Thevet, cosmographe de la Renaissance*, Paris : Presses de l’université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003, 216.

¹¹⁵ Thevet, *op. cit.*, 389.

¹¹⁶ It is difficult to pinpoint exact passages when Mann evokes this in particular, because it is the topic of the whole book. See for instance his chapter on “The Artificial Wilderness.” This quote from the introduction of the book, “Holmberg’s Mistake,” sums up the misgivings about the

anthropology and archeology have shown that indigenous populations in Pre-Columbian America did indeed develop a sophisticated agriculture. While Cartier and Thevet cannot deny that these people have dwellings, customs, craftsmanship, they can however deny their labor on the land, through the hyperbole of the wild.

The topic of agriculture and labor, nonetheless, has great importance in Thevet, who begins the *Singularitez* with a thought on labor:

La terre nous montre extérieurement une face triste et melancolique, couverte le plus souvent de pierres, épines et chardons, ou autres semblables. Mais si le laboureur la veut ouvrir avec faux et charrue, il trouvera cette vertu tant excellente, prête à lui produire à merveilles et le récompenser au centuple¹¹⁷
[The land shows us externally its sad and melancholy face, most frequently covered with stones, thorns and chards, or others. But if the plowman wants to open it with scythe and plow, he will found this virtue so excellent, ready to produce marvelously and to reward him hundredfold]

The dream of abundance is there, but fertility and the beauty of the wild are, at first, ignored: the earth is represented as a wasteland that is only rendered fertile by human labor. If such is the case, then how come the rest of the narrative focuses on so many descriptions of an independently fertile, wild land? The fertility of a land, as he explains in the case of Madeira, comes “tant de son naturel et situation [...] que pour les fontaines et vives sources [...]: aussi pour avoir diligemment enrichi le lieu de labourages” [as

topic: “Erickson and Balée belong to a cohort of scholars that in recent years has radically challenged conventional notions of what the Western Hemisphere was like before Columbus. When I went to high school, in the 1970s, I was taught that Indians came to the Americas across the Berong Strait about thirteen thousand years ago, that they lived for the most part in small, isolated groups, and that they had so little impact on their environment that even after millenia of habitation the continents remained mostly wilderness. Schools still impart the same ideas today. One way to summarize the views of people like Erickson and Balée would be to say that they regard this picture of Indian life as wrong in almost every aspect. Indians were here far longer than previously thought, these researchers believe, and in much greater numbers. And they were so successful at imposing their will on the landscape that in 1492 Columbus set foot in a hemisphere thoroughly marked by humankind.” (4)

¹¹⁷ Thevet, *op. cit.*, 56.

much naturally as for its location and for the waterfalls and springs: as much as for having diligently enriched the land with plowing].¹¹⁸ Thus, there is an undefined something, aside from the natural fertility, the location, and the presence of sources of water for irrigation, that allows the fertility to blossom completely, as is expressed in “diligemment enrichi le lieu de labourage.” The adverb “diligemment” certainly points to human labor, while the verb *enrichir* evokes a collaboration between the natural fertility of the land, and the *labourage* that allows it to flourish. In fact, “diligemment enrichi” is an idealistic, pre-sustainable commentary; the author chooses to see only how the land has been improved with diligent labor, and not, instead, how much environmental risk there is in such monocultures that were imposed upon the Atlantic islands of Madeira and the Canaries. It is exactly what Thevet narrates thus:

[...] ainsi qu’un Portugais maître pilote m’a récité: furent contraints mettre le feu dedans les bois [...] de la plus grande et principale île [...]; où le feu continua l’espace de cinq à six jours de telle véhémence et ardeur qu’ils furent contraints de sauver et garantir leurs navires; [...] Incontinent après se mirent à labourer, planter et semer graines diverses qui profitèrent merveilleusement bien pour la bonne disposition et aménité de l’air [...]. Entre autres choses ils ont planté abondance de cannes, qui portent fort bon sucre; dont il se fait grand trafic, et aujourd’hui est célébré le sucre de Madère.

[as a Portuguese master pilot told me: they were forced to set fire to the woods of the biggest and main island; where the fire continued for five to six days and so vehemently and ardently that they were forced to save and protect their vessels; immediately after they started to plough, plant and sow various seeds, which thrived marvelously well, from the good disposition and quality of the air. Among other things, they planted an abundance of canes, which produced very good sugar; of which now it is made a great traffic, and today the sugar of Madeira is celebrated.]

The anecdote is narrated as if the settlers had been led, under constraint, to set fire to the whole island, in order to get arable land, which then led them to be forced to prevent their

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 83.

own vessels from burning too. In hindsight, if anything, the land has been diligently impoverished, and not enriched, by cultivating only sugar and citruses for the purpose of trade with Spain.¹¹⁹ In fact, in *Green Imperialism*, Richard H. Grove affirms that “Extensive descriptions exist of the damaging ecological effects of deforestation and European plantations agriculture in the Canary Islands and Madeira (...) after about 1300 and in the West Indies after 1560.”¹²⁰ The idea of environmental degradation as a necessary consequence of plantation agriculture and deforestation arguably makes its way in the popular culture of the Renaissance, at the same time as the same culture processes the new continent.

Unfortunately, this does not necessarily mean that Thevet avoids the *topos* of wilderness, since he encounters it as soon as he describes Madagascar: “Et qu’ainsi soit, la terre produit là arbres fruitiers de soi-même, sans planter ni cultiver, qui apportent néanmoins leurs fruits aussi doux et plaisants à manger que si les arbres avaient été entés” [For the land produces there fruit trees on its own, without planting or cultivating, that nevertheless bring fruits as sweet and pleasant to eat as if the trees had been trimmed].¹²¹ The phrasing is ambivalent: technically, even in France, the land had to produce fruit trees on its own before agriculture came to rationalize and augment the products. As Thevet puts it himself: “car même en notre Europe et autres pays, au commencement les hommes vivaient des fruits que la terre produisait d’elle même sans être labourée. Vrai

¹¹⁹ One only needs to look at the postcolonial work of anthropologists like Vanessa Agard-Jones (Columbia University) who studies the toxicities implied by the monocultures of the Caribbean, for instance, in her current book project *Body Burdens: Toxic Endurance and Decolonial Desire in the French Atlantic*, which she presented at Cornell University on March 1st, 2017, in her talk “After the End of the World: Black/Queer Life and the Anthropocene.”

¹²⁰ Grove, *op. cit.*, 5.

¹²¹ Thevet, *op. cit.*, 115.

est que l'agriculture est fort ancienne, comme il appert par l'Ecriture [...]” [For even in our Europe and in other countries at the beginning men lived of the fruits that the earth produced on its own without being labored. It is true that agriculture is very ancient: as it is visible in writing].¹²² He coincides with Cartier again when, like the latter did with the vines, he seems to give a higher aesthetic value to cultivated nature than to the wild. He speaks of a fruit that can be found – a lot of the wild plants and fruits, indeed, are found and picked, as part of the cliché of wilderness, like the oysters in the oyster tree above – on the sand of the beach, some “fèves marines,” that are “plus épaisses et plus grosses” [thicker and bigger], so much so “que l’on dirait à les voir qu’elles sont artificielles” [that it seems, looking at them, that they are artificial].¹²³ In the French Renaissance, therefore, the travel narratives in the New World juxtapose, paradoxically, a fascination for a fertile wilderness and an aesthetic taste for the artificial, the cultivated.

Somewhere in between defining a more or less assertive, more or less superlative abundance, and manifesting a fascination for the artificiality of agriculture, Cartier and Thevet fabricate an early modern French topos of the New World; it involves a certain kind of wilderness, a peculiar vibrancy of the environment that offers up its abundance as its only coherent and apprehensible dimension. With such a representation, it would seem as if the environment was defined by its self-sufficiency, and yet Cartier in particular paradoxically implies, at times, the need for a human hand. By focusing uniquely on rendering the New World apprehensible, both writers effectively reveal significant

¹²² Ibid., 293.

¹²³ Ibid., 154.

insights what they do not write about: France (non-antarctique). The texts are characterized throughout by a constant back and forth movement relating, comparing, and assessing the New World in relation with the kingdom of France. Abundance is pivotal because it is ambivalent, and vice versa. Cartier and Thevet begin to show what the second chapter will confirm: that the environment, through abundance, can never, perhaps cannot anymore, or never could in the first place, in the French Renaissance at least—as this is not the case for Columbus, for instance—be represented as a positive, coherent whole. The environment of the New World effectively disorients French explorers, since it does not accept accurate comparisons—they have to be fabricated out of many objects—and since it cannot achieve full superlativity in relation to France. It is the rhetoric, in this way, that shows the gaps, that reveals the true representation of the New World: the fact that Cartier and Thevet have a similar rhetoric of satisfaction and disappointment—the criteria of which, identified above, could be summed up as redundancy, superlativity, issues of comparative degrees and of fulfilling expectations—demonstrates that, in some way, such a rhetoric is dictated by the environment of the New World itself. If the rhetoric can be qualified as exhibiting a form of energy and enthusiasm that frequently yields to a more monotonous—and perhaps honest—perception of the land, it shows that, when trying to assert abundance, there is always an automatic degree of emptiness, in a compensatory movement that also surfaces in the fiction of François Rabelais. This, already, constitutes what I call the ecology of waste.

Chapter II

“Et voilà l’ouvrage gasté”: Managing Waste from France to the New World in Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel*

Formerly dismissed by the *classiques* as “ordure,” notably in Jean de la Bruyère’s reading of them, the works of Rabelais are now overwhelmingly read as narratives of excess by Rabelaisian critics.¹²⁴ However, excess often is perceived paradoxically as a form of plenitude. Bakhtin, most notably, described the lower material bodily stratum as a fundamentally positive, universal, joyful and benevolent principle. This chapter will demonstrate that the corporeality of the Rabelaisian text is decidedly ambivalent, simultaneously embodying Bakhtin’s interpretation and a perhaps more accurate one: the “ordure” is not merely positive, but is the focal point of that ambivalence that presides over the narrative, as is visible in close readings of the famed tripe passage, of the *propos torcheculatif* and of the walls of Paris episode in *Pantagruel*.

Indeed, the relationship between the human and the earth that is so emphasized by Bakhtin could be qualified as a harmonious, joyful flow from mouth to anus, from the giving earth to the ground again. Explaining his concept of banquet imagery, Bakhtin writes: “Man’s encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself. The limits between man and the world are erased, to man’s advantage.”¹²⁵ It is also significant that Terence

¹²⁴ Notable works include, of course, Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World*, introduced in France by Michel Beaujour in *Le Jeu de Rabelais*, Paris: l’Herne, 1969. More recently, Terence Cave’s *The Cornucopian Text* or Michel Jeanneret’s *Le Défi des signes, Rabelais et la crise de l’interprétation à la Renaissance*, Orléans: Paradigme, 1994, focus on excess in the rhetorical sense, while the latter’s *Des mets et des mots: banquets et propos de table à la Renaissance*, Paris: J. Corti, 1987, evokes a material, corporeal excess.

¹²⁵ Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, 281.

Cave's *The Cornucopian Text*, in a more rhetorical and linguistic approach, foregrounds the same movements: in his study of *copia*, he writes of a "movement towards plenitude"¹²⁶ and of a "principle of *écoulement*,"¹²⁷ which could correspond, beyond the linguistic realm, to environmental notions that are most definitely at play in Rabelais's works in particular. Both Rabelaisian scholars have the intuition of a flow or flux that must be suggested in the text. They both, however, fail to see that the *écoulement* is always compensated by moments of blockage that I would call regulatory—in the process of waste in Rabelais, moments of blockage indeed serve to effectively regulate, rebalance, or readjust the excess.

Engaging in more detail with Rabelais's texts, I argue that one finds a darker, less joyful reading of the adventures of Pantagruel than the one advanced decades ago by Bakhtin. First, it is originally because Bakhtin's seminal work on Rabelais contains in potentiality an environmental dimension.¹²⁸ Secondly, one of the principal observations of this project is the perception of a progressive turning of the foundational abundance (in its positive acceptation) into a darker conception of excess (the negative complement of

¹²⁶ Cave, *op. cit.*, 25.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 128: he also relates the *écoulement* to the image of the inexhaustible barrel.

¹²⁸ In the early stages of this project, the only published trace of such a potentiality could be found in a 2011 textbook by Michael Meyerfield Bell, *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*, claiming that "Bakhtin pointed out that individualism deeply influences the way we regard the main medium by which we are connected to the environment: our bodies. Individualism encourages us to see our bodies as sealed off from others and from the natural world, with a host of consequences for what we regard as dirty, as repulsive, as polite, as scary, and even what we regard as humorous. All of these cultural responses to how our bodies interact with the world have important environmental implications, as we shall see." For more details, see p. 158. In early 2017, more ecology textbooks point out Bakhtin's familiarity with such notions, for instance 2016 *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, ed. Zapf, Hubert. Moreover, some articles in literary criticism have been published that take Bakhtin's works to environmental conclusions: Timo Müller's "Notes towards an Ecological Conception of Bakhtin's Chronotope" in the recently started journal *Ecozone*, v.1, No 1, but most notably Michael Gardiner's "Ecology and Carnival: Traces of a "Green" Social Theory in the Writings of M. M. Bakhtin," in *Theory and Society*, vol. 22, issue 6, pp. 765-812, 1993.

the former)¹²⁹. In Rabelais, this is verified by the toning down of the images of proliferating excess; while they do not disappear, they certainly follow a sort of purification process, becoming less potent, less frequent, and less abject perhaps. Thirdly, because a similar movement can be found progressing from a narrative very centered on the French kingdom to a very global, and in fact transatlantic one. This naturally leads to a problematic question: does the evolution of waste in the books of Rabelais follow the direction of human endeavors towards the New World? Does it then have something to do with the piling up or even the emptying out of resources on both sides of the Atlantic?

I shall argue that both the environment and the New World, previously overlooked, respectively, as a mere background to the narrative and as a change of focus in Rabelais' geographical inspiration - that is to say, from an oriental frame of reference to a progressively western one, culminating in what has been read, since Abel Lefranc, as a homage to Jacques Cartier's travel through the Atlantic Northwest – are actually pivotal to reading Rabelais's works.¹³⁰ Even further, I will demonstrate that these two concepts are also crucial to one another, in the context of Renaissance France but also of what Serge Gruzinski has deemed the first *mondialisation* of the history of our world.¹³¹ If the environment has been overlooked, it is merely insofar as it usually is or was, in

¹²⁹ In this nomenclature, I follow Rebecca Zorach's distinction, in *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold*, where she implies that abundance refers to positive images of fertility and natural plenty, whereas excess comes in later, as a problematic aspect. While not clearly defined and delimited, the distinction is subtly made throughout the introduction, "An Incomprehensible Abundance."

¹³⁰ In *Les Navigations de Pantagruel* (Paris: H. Leclerc, 1905), Abel Lefranc spends a copious amount of time demonstrating that there are visible traces of an encounter between François Rabelais and Jacques Cartier in St Malo. Citing from an opusculé on the city of St Malo, Lefranc writes: "Rabelais vint apprendre de ce Cartier les termes de la marine et du pilotage à Saint-Malo pour en chamarrer ses bouffonnesques Lucianismes et impies épiqueurismes," p. 60.

¹³¹ Gruzinski, Serge, *Les quatre parties du monde*, Paris: Editions de la Martinière, 2004. Gruzinski converts the modern notion of *mondialisation* (globalization) to sixteenth-century Iberia, since, as the epigraph by Lope de Vega exposes, "El mundo se puede andar por tierra de Felipe" (11).

literary criticism, up to the recent expansion of the discipline of ecocriticism, conflated with nature, and meaningful only as a background in the tradition of close reading¹³². If anything, part of what was indeed revolutionary in Bakhtin's seminal but flawed study of Rabelais's world was how deeply intertwined the environment was with the bodies of the characters and that of the people in general. On the other hand, Rabelais is so often exalted as one of the first great French authors that the scholarship on his work tends to be franco-centered, or to focus on his sources (Ancient writers, religious training), thus omitting that he was in many ways as global as, if not more than William Shakespeare, as cosmopolitan as Cervantès.¹³³ Lefranc rectified this centuries-old perception of the canon with *Les navigations de Pantagruel: étude sur la géographie rabelaisienne* in 1904, almost a century ago, but has not sparked, to my knowledge, a new direction in Rabelaisian studies. Such a focus speaks to the fact that Rabelais was attentive to and in fact extremely perceptive towards both environmental alterations and the colonial enterprises in the New World. In my reading, the discovery of the New World effectively alters the perception of abundance in the kingdom of France.

¹³² In his 1996 *The Environmental Imagination*, Lawrence Buell mostly lays the groundwork for ecocritics in the following distinction, qualifying an environmental text: "The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history" (7). In his later work, 2005 *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*, he defines the environmental turn in two waves, which he prefers to call palimpsest (placing his first book in the first, and his second book in the second: the first wave would cover nature in literature, and the usual suspects Emerson, Thoreau, etc. The second would then tend "to question organicist models of conceiving both environment and environmentalism," (22) perhaps characterized mainly, in his mind, by the extension of the notion of environment to the built environment as well as the natural one, including then scholars like Jane Bennett and her "social ecocriticism."

¹³³ See, for instance, Robert Wilson in "The Curiosity of Nations: Shakespeare Thinks of the World" in *Etudes Epistémè*, 27, 2015, or his book *Worldly Shakespeare: The Theater of Our Good Will*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.

The narratives do acknowledge a change in the perception of the environment and that of the global world: in terms of the frame of reference, *Pantagruel*, the first book written and published in a series of four (or five), is significantly more centered on France than the next book, *Gargantua*, and much less than the *Quart Livre*, in which the action takes place entirely at sea. Yet a demonstration of this argument that would leave aside *Pantagruel* completely would be mistaken. Richard Berrong, in *Rabelais and Bakhtin*, endeavors to criticize the conclusions of the latter by emphasizing how different *Pantagruel* is from the rest of the narrative, claiming that Bakhtin bases his whole view on this single book, whereas the rest of the narrative does not fit his interpretation at all, as is quite visible with the abbey of Thélème in *Gargantua*. Berrong bases his demonstration on the frequency of vulgar references to waste in all the books. He explains the phenomenon as popular culture losing “the equal footing with learned culture it had enjoyed in *Pantagruel*.”¹³⁴ While Bakhtin presents waste as a constant in Rabelais’s world – although his close readings are quite limited to the first two books – Berrong attempts to rectify his visibly restricted reading by measuring it in an almost quantitative and literal manner, rather than conceptual: “In short, the values and views of popular culture on the acceptability of dirt in general and excrement in particular, so clearly evident in *Pantagruel*, have just as clearly been excluded from *Gargantua* by the midpoint of the novel.”¹³⁵ Such a limited view is only possible if one reads ‘dirt’ as merely a physical image, as Berrong illustrates by using ‘excrement’ immediately after ‘dirt’: he never defines his object clearly, and thus only remains on the surface, searching

¹³⁴ Berrong, Richard, *Rabelais and Bakhtin: Popular Culture in Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986, 21.

¹³⁵ Berrong, *op. cit.*, 28.

the Rabelaisian text for whatever he considers to be, I would argue, vulgar, since vulgarity is such an obvious opposite, in his conception, to learned culture. As a result, his definition of popular culture ends up confused with a certain idea of dirt or excrement. It is to this extent that my definition of waste operates an enlargement of the concept of a material, literal waste. I would argue instead that the concept of waste that the text constructs throughout is much more philosophical, environmental and phenomenological, even, than it is material. It speaks of stewarding the resources, it is concerned with consuming in general, and with the vanity of man's labor in the face of environmental events— which I define as a moment in the life of the people *in* the environment that goes out of the ordinary, daily life. Reading any figure of waste as environmental, and reading the environment and the New World as keys to the narratives allow for a more coherent and cohesive interpretation of all of the Rabelaisian text and of its relationship to the concept of waste.

I. "Et voyla l'ouvrage gasté": Waste, Plenitude and Scarcity from Pantagruel to the Quart Livre

In this way, waste amounts to a conceptual system that is foundational to these narratives. My reading will demonstrate that not all waste is bodily, and therefore, that a full comprehension of waste in Rabelais needs to depart from Bakhtin's conception of the lower bodily stratum. With a more expanded notion of waste, concerning all bodies, human and nonhuman, the continuity between *Pantagruel* – supposedly so different from the rest of the books – and the *Quart Livre* becomes clearer and undeniable. I would propose to connect this waste to the ambivalence between plenitude and scarcity perceived in the environment of the Rabelaisian text. In what is often called the walls of

Paris episode, in the middle of *Pantagruel*, Rabelais sketches a defensive wall paradoxically made of holes. Panurge, Pantagruel's companion, imagines a better way or "une maniere bien nouvelle" [a very novel way] to defend the city, with a wall made of female genitalia.¹³⁶ The chapter illustrates the logic of compensation that will soon become systematic in the Rabelaisian text, already present in the first chapter of *Pantagruel* where the famine has to end on a feast.

Hence, it is said that the only problem with this wall is that it appeals to flies who consequently relieve themselves there - in French, "elles y font leur ordure", the word *ordure* meaning both garbage and animals' excrement. The next sentence is, precisely, "and thus the work would be wasted"¹³⁷ or "et voilà l'ouvrage gasté," but the French *voilà* hints at a present enunciation rather than a conditional. This sentence could be interpreted as an exclamation of the author, contemplating his own invention, something closer to "and thus my work *is* wasted" or "*filled with waste*" (my emphasis). Indeed, *ouvrage* refers to a work but also to a book, as in English, except that it has to be differentiated from the word *oeuvre*, more solemn and probably too arrogant for Rabelais: *ouvrage* also indicates the way Rabelais works as a writer, that is to say, with the technique and art of a poet.¹³⁸ It is remarkable that Rabelais chooses to use the French word *gasté*, which does not exactly equal the English 'waste' but rather, in the Cotgrave

¹³⁶ Rabelais, François, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1994. The English translation, unless specified otherwise, will come from Donald Frame's translation, *The Complete Works of François Rabelais*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1991, 183.

¹³⁷ This translation is my own. Frame translates "It's just that flies are extraordinarily fond of them, and would swarm around and leave their droppings there, and there would be the work spoiled" (184).

¹³⁸ Indeed, Boileau speaks in his *Art Poétique* of the necessity to rework twenty times on the *ouvrage* (Boileau 242).

dictionary, signifies spoiled, corrupted, or even ruined.¹³⁹ Later in the books, he repeats the word but with an inexplicable change of spelling between *gasté* in *Pantagruel* and *guast(er)*¹⁴⁰ in the *Tiers* and *Quart Livres*. Two different words, the character Gaster and the verb ‘gaster’ are thus made to resemble one another, putting together their singular etymology; messere Gaster refers to the stomach, the same word in both Latin and Greek, while the verb “gaster” comes from the Latin *vastare*.

The chapter thus stages ‘ordure’ and ‘gasté,’ representing typical examples of the different but interconnected notions of waste that fill up *Pantagruel* and the rest of the books. ‘Ordure’ refers to the same bodily waste that prompted Bakhtin to conceptualize his lower bodily stratum, the first definition of which is found in the introduction of *Rabelais and His World*: “To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth.”¹⁴¹ As such, one could think that the walls of Paris, with their references to female genitalia and ‘ordure,’ are an excellent illustration of the lower bodily stratum. Yet the text emphasizes another important dimension of waste: the potentiality of *gâter*, of wasting but also rotting – in this context – or squandering. In fact, the concept is immediately contrasted – or compensated – by the concern for spending wisely, which is the original motivation for Panurge’s idea: “Davantaige, qui la vouldroit emmurailler comme Strasbourg, Orleans,

¹³⁹ See the complete entry in the Cotgrave: “to wast, marre, spill, spoyle; viciate, corrupt, invert, pervert, seduce, deprave; infect; violate; soyle, defile, distaine; consume, ruine, undoe, deface, destroy, turne upside downe.”

¹⁴⁰ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 478. It is curious, also, that the apparition of “guaster” comes during another discussion of flies: “[...] et rioyt de ce que messieurs de la dicte chambre guastoient tous leurs bonnetz à force de luy dauber ses espaules [...]” [and he was laughing at how the gentlemen of the said Court were ruining their bonnets by basting him on the shoulders;] (379).

¹⁴¹ Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, 21.

ou Ferrare, il ne seroit possible, tant les frais et despens seroyent excessifz.”

[“Furthermore, if anyone wanted to wall it around like Strasbourg, Orléans, or Ferrara, it would be impossible, so excessive would be the costs and expenses.”]¹⁴² Excessive spending or expenditure surfaces as a concern which, despite being merely the occasion of satire, will reappear again in the *Tiers Livre*, a book otherwise relatively deprived of manifestations of Bakhtin’s lower bodily stratum.¹⁴³ Waste in its various forms is more of a constant in the books once one looks beyond the mere bodily stratum. It appears to be positioned in the interstitial space between human and nonhuman bodies, encompassing both the flies, their *ordure* and the human genitalia, but also the potential bodies of the soldiers that would attack the city and attempt to overpass the wall. It is also subsumed in the fluidity between human and nonhuman bodies, a defensive wall of stones suddenly imagined as being built out of women’s genital organs. The walls of Paris, in this way, represents quite accurately this multifaceted notion of waste.

In this reading of the Rabelaisian treatment of waste in all the books, it is all the more significant that precisely as Rabelais gets closer to introducing a character named Gaster, he modifies the spelling of the verb *gaster*. Is it to differentiate the verb from the character or, on the contrary, to emphasize both words by manipulating the reader into noticing them even more? In that sense, the episode of the walls of Paris works as a sample of the style of writing in the rest of the books: Rabelais seems to always compensate for his representations of plenitude (multiple scenes of banquets, nativity of Pantagruel) with corresponding representations of scarcity and emptiness - or perhaps is it the other way around, the question being: where does waste stand in this ambivalence?

¹⁴² Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 268; 183.

¹⁴³ It will also be echoed in Montaigne’s “Des coches,” the object of the fourth and final chapter.

Is it emptiness or plenitude? In fact, this ambivalence is essential to the etymology of the word waste. In Latin, *vastare* means to render desert, to empty, to ravage, to ruin, to pillage and to devastate. Therefore, the etymological meaning of emptying contrasts heavily with its own consequence, the necessary accumulation of what is wasted in one place. *Gaster* and *vastare* have a paradoxical relationship to one another: the stomach fills itself just so that it can be empty again, while the meaning of *vastare* implies that what is emptied, ravaged, ruined still fills another space with its remains. Only something that was once full can be emptied, be it a body or a geographical space. Hence, plenitude and scarcity coexist in the concept of waste as they do in Rabelais' work, and, in fact, in the Old and New World's perception of excess and lack. What appears as an excess of food and excrement is really an oxymoron: the abundance of food is immediately contradicted or denied by its logical result, the profusion of excrement. So does the Rabelaisian text foreground plenitude or scarcity? Most importantly, which of the two generated the need for the other?

To further explore this ambivalence, I will focus on a close reading of the episode where Gaster appears, in the *Quart Livre*.¹⁴⁴ Insofar as the *Quart Livre* represents a voyage in the North Atlantic, it would be difficult to read the descriptions of these fictional islands as anything else than at least a reference to, if not a satire of, the New World and its discovery narratives. The representation of waste on Gaster's island is thus important in order to understand the true ambivalence of either abundance or excess, but also that of either plenitude or scarcity, in a mid-century perception of America. As previously mentioned, in the chronology of the narrative, one can see an evolution in

¹⁴⁴ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 671.

Rabelais' cycle of works on the use of waste. *Gargantua* as a child invents a revolutionary way of wiping himself in one of the central episodes.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, his birth has been provoked by the fact that his mother Gargamelle ate too much *tripe*.¹⁴⁶ As Bakhtin explains it, *tripe* blurs the distinction between food and waste, since it refers to a dish that includes remains of excrement:

The stomach and bowels of cattle, tripe, were carefully cleaned, salted and cooked. Tripe could not be preserved long; they were therefore consumed in great quantities on slaughtering days and cost nothing. Moreover, it was believed that after cleaning, tripe still contained ten percent excrement which was therefore eaten with the rest of the meal.¹⁴⁷

Gargantua thus starts off with a peculiar mixture of food and excrement. Then, *Pantagruel* introduces the ambivalence of famine and feast with his "nativity," and that of empty and closed spaces with the walls of Paris. All those themes find a common interpretation in Louise Vasvari's study of what she calls "gastro-genital excess and reversals."¹⁴⁸ In the *Tiers Livre*, we are faced with images of the body's potential putrefaction, all organs failing for they refuse to lend anything to one another, "[e]t ira soubdain le corps en putrefaction" - putrefaction being a possible definition of the French *gâter* - as Panurge praises debtors and creditors.¹⁴⁹ Hence, when getting to the *Quart Livre*, one would probably expect some synthesis, and would find it on Gaster's island. In

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 38.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 16.

¹⁴⁷ Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, 162.

¹⁴⁸ For details, see Vasvari, Louise, The Battle of Flesh and Lent in the *Libro del Arcipreste*: Gastro-Genital Rites of Reversal," *La corónica*, 20:1 (1991), 1-15.

¹⁴⁹ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 364. In fact, Kathleen Long suggested to me that the *Tiers Livre* could be read as the logical continuation of the walls of Paris episode. From bodiless vaginas filled with assailing phalluses, the *Tiers Livre* moves to women being the main topic of masculine discourse, even though they are otherwise almost entirely absent as characters.

the last book of the *Chroniques*, Pantagruel and Panurge travel around the world to find the “Dive Bouteille” and they find themselves disembarking on this strange island.¹⁵⁰

En icelluy jour Pantagruel descendit en une isle admirable, entre toutes aultres, tant à cause de l’assiete, que du gouverneur d’icelle. Elle de tous coustez pour le commencement estoit scabreuse, pierreuse, montueuse, infertile, mal plaisante à l’oeil, tresdifficile aux pieds, et peu moins inaccessible que le mons du Daulphiné ainsi dict, pource qu’il est en forme d’un potiron (...). Surmontant la difficulté de l’entrée à peine bien grande, et non sans suer, trouvasmes le dessus du mons tant plaisant, tant fertile, tant salubre, et delicieux, que je pensoys estre le vray Jardin et Paradis terrestre (...).

[One day Pantagruel and his companions descended on an island, admirable among the others for its landscape and for its governor. At the beginning it was on all sides scabrous, rocky, steep, infertile, unpleasant to the eye, very hard on the feet, and a little less inaccessible than the Mount Dauphiné, which is said to be thus because it has the shape of a winter squash (...). Once we overcame the difficulty of the narrow entrance, and not without a sweat, we found that the top of the mountain was so pleasant, so fertile, so salubrious and delicious, that I thought it was the real Garden and earthly Paradise (...).]¹⁵¹

The island is described as distinctively separated between two antithetical regions; one a barren desert, the other fertile. The ambivalence prevails in its whole description: it is an *admirable* island, described in the next sentence as scabrous, rocky, steep and infertile. The description thus subsumes both sense of the word *admirable* at the time: it is just as worthy of admiration as it is awe-inspiring. Furthermore, *scabreuse* having the double meaning of rough and indecent seems like a warning from the author as to the shocking nature of his text. The title of the chapter says that Pantagruel goes down to meet Gaster, but the description of the island includes a long paragraph on the difficulty of going up

¹⁵⁰ It has always been a subject of argument to determine if Rabelais is the author of the *Fifth Book*, but it is generally accepted now that he cannot be more than an inspiration of that text. On this subject, Mireille Huchon gives a short synthesis in the introduction of the *Oeuvres Complètes*.

¹⁵¹ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 671; the translation is mine, in order to stay as close to the original as possible.

the steep hill that leads to the master. The sense of direction is confounded, so that the disembarkement amounts to a disorientation. The space of the island remains suspended between two extremes, aridity and fertility; like the island, the text spares for itself as many empty spaces as saturated ones.

Earlier in the *Quart Livre*, there is a parable of the Devil who, seeing an old woman's genitals, is scared to death and flees, thinking it is a black hole threatening to absorb him into nothingness.¹⁵² Rabelais seems to disseminate holes in his text, threatening both the reader and the Devil with this nothingness. He also consequently needs to fill those holes, like the story of the lion and the fox in the episode of the walls of Paris who, seeing another old woman's genitals, feel the imperious necessity to fill in the *playe* [the wound]. The familiarity of both episodes certainly hints at a continuous motif: upon both occasions, Rabelais chooses to name the female genital organ as the "solution de continuité."¹⁵³ We see a similarly shaped cavity when, to get to the fertile side of the island, one needs to "overcome the difficulty of a narrow entrance." However, it could also be a metaphor of the stomach, reached through the esophagus, which shares with the vagina the particularity of being a tunnel: the "solution de continuité" appears to be a quite accurate representation, in strictly literal terms, in this way. Therefore, another

¹⁵² Ibid., 648. The passage is situated in chapter XLVII, "Comment le Diable fut trompé par une Vieille de Papefiguiere."

¹⁵³ Ibid., 270: "[...] l'on a blessé ceste bonne femme icy entre les jambes bien villainement et y a solution de continuité manifeste, regarde que la playe est grande." In this episode (the walls of Paris), the satirical apposition of a medieval scholastic term, 'solution de continuité,' to the female organ is justified in that the lion and the fox are in the process of investigating the 'playe.' In the *Quart Livre*, there is no trace of an investigative dialogue, and yet the phrase is taken up again, implying that it is the genitals themselves that are associated with that name: "Le Diable voyant l'enorme solution de continuité en toutes dimensions, s'escria [...]" (648). There would be a lot to say about the perception of female sexuality as mysterious, potentially immeasurable, and vain, and its dependence on a perception of female pleasure as unrelated to the reproductive dimension of sex.

image of void is placed before an image of fertility (stomach, vagina). Moreover, the island is said to have the shape of a winter squash, thus resembling a stomach or even a uterus. Like the cornucopia that Terence Cave explores, these bodily cavities are containers that, as Rebecca Zorach puts it, “may imply an emptying out as much as an abundant and liberal outpouring.”¹⁵⁴ Gaster himself is one such container, since he is a stomach.

Gaster is described like the first great master of art (in the sense of technique), governor of the island. Here again we have an ambivalence, since Gaster is introduced together with his female counterpart, Penie.¹⁵⁵ Literally, her name signifies the lack of something, or even poverty. Therefore, the stomach Gaster is always represented as potentially empty, while its organic function is to be filled, or rather satiated. Next to them, another character is mentioned: “Porus seigneur de Abondance” [Porus, lord of Abundance]. Certainly, Rabelais did not invent these names himself, and merely borrowed them from Plato’s *Symposium*, in Diotima’s tale of the origins of love, where Poros and Penia are the genitors of Aphrodite. They represent the two opposites, Penia being poverty, and Poros plenty. In this way, it is nevertheless interesting that Rabelais chooses, rather than the Greek Poros, (Πόρος: referring to wealth or resource, but also to a means of passing a river), the latinized Porus, which in Latin means a tube or a conduit. Through this etymology, it is thus closer to the French ‘pore,’ a hole in the skin that allows communication between the inside and the outside or, in the definition of the *Trésor de la Langue Française*, “chacun des interstices qui séparent les molécules d’un

¹⁵⁴ Zorach, *op. cit.*, 10.

¹⁵⁵ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 672.

corps” or “ouverture imperceptible dans la peau.” In some way, Rabelais evokes again the openness of the body with the outside world. Therefore, Porus the conduit can refer to the many female genitals of the text, and to the oesophagus or the uterus. Abundance is thus symbolized by a necessarily traversable tube, a solution of continuity. And this tube communicates between the outside world, the environment, and the human bodies of Gaster, Porus, but also the genitalia the walls of Paris would be made of.

Rabelais maintains Gaster as an ambivalent symbol; the inhabitants of his island worship him like their god, but is he the God of hunger or of food? He is a stomach, but since a stomach can be either full or empty, he represents both hunger and satiety. However, his association with Penie hints at the sense of hunger. His voice too is that of hunger, the gurgle of which shakes the whole island like an earthquake; thus, the limits of his body and of that of the island are not distinguished, a fact reinforced by the quotation of Aesop’s fable of the “The Belly and the Members.” The island and its inhabitants depend on Gaster being satiated, just as our bodies depend on the satiety of our stomach, which is itself impossible to maintain. One of the keys of the episode is thus the absurd – as in theater of the absurd, that is, of generous or resistant gestures that are empty or futile. The people of the island go on a hunger strike to protest against a God-stomach, and Gaster himself, being deaf, gives the gift of poetry to birds that he cannot hear. The Gaster episode thus stages reliability and the interdependence of bodies in the middle of a mimetic voyage to the North Atlantic, at a time when the French kings envision its colonization.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ As Lefranc puts it, hypotheses about the passage of the West “orientent le voyage de Pantagruel vers les régions problématiques qui excitèrent à un si haut point la curiosité des

The theme of emptying is omnipresent in Rabelais's works, notably in the *Tiers Livre*, with the repetition of words like *vuidange* or *vuidier* [empty].¹⁵⁷ In the last paragraph of the episode, we are made to understand the balancing role that Penie plays on the island; she represents the necessary threat of hunger. Moreover, when famine begins, "toutes ordonnances (sont) vaines" [all ordinances vain], where the play on words continues, with "vaines" meaning both useless and empty.¹⁵⁸ Vanitas, a pictorial representation of the ephemeral nature of life through images of death and skulls, often surrounded by symbols of great wealth and plenty, is another form of the absurd, but it is also another dimension of Panurge's *gaster*. In the meaning of *gaster*, of waste, the idea of absurd squandering and of *ordure* coexist with that of emptiness, devastation and desert. Gaster's episode offers a point of view from the top of the island over the rest of the work; as the text strives to fill in a void, here symbolized by hunger, through a narrative full of food and excrement, those who worship Gaster on his island react to the fear of famine by listing a gargantuan amount of comestibles, in two consecutive chapters listing what Gaster eats during Lent and on regular days.

As in Beckett, the absurd is closely linked to a sense of the vanity of all things, of which the sentence "Et tout pour la trippe" ["And all for the gut!"] is the refrain, since it

contemporains de Louis XII et de François Ier," 22. Francis 1st is the one who sends Giovanni di Verrazzano to Florida and Newfoundland, and a decade later, Jacques Cartier to Canada. Henry 2nd, in 1556, commands Nicolas de Villegagnon to start a colony of Huguenots in France Antarctique (Brazil), which is the one that André Thevet visits. In 1562, Charles IX sends Jean Ribault and some Huguenots settlers to Florida, to take possession of land there. Each of these attempts meets a swift failure, and by the second half of the century, the political upheavals in France – the wars of Religion – erase any thought of expansion from the minds of the kings.

¹⁵⁷ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 475, 468, 478.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 673; 562.

is being repeated four times at the end of the chapter.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, *tripes* is another essential and unstable word in Rabelais, the spelling of which changes from one book to the other: in *Gargantua*, “les tripes furent copieuses” [“The tripes were copious [...]”]¹⁶⁰ and in the *Quart Livre*, “Et tout pour la trippe.” Furthermore, we have seen with Bakhtin the importance of the *tripes* in Rabelais’ conception of the world. If all is going to end in *tripes*, that is to say in excrement, we exist in vain; we eat, excrete, and then eat our own excrement in the *tripes*. Absurdity in that sense is at the center of physiological life, but also of the Rabelaisian text. The central image in Rabelais’ *vanitas* is not a skull but rather excrement; thus, the ending of Gaster’s episode invites the reader to “veoir, considerer, et contempler quelle divinité ilz trouvoient en sa matiere fecale” [“to see, consider, philosophize and contemplate what divinity they found in his fecal matter.”]¹⁶¹ Gaster himself deduces that there is indeed nothing divine in his excrement, although the sublimation of all sorts of “gastro-genital excess” in the Rabelaisian text prompts us to think further; there is a balance in the episode, as in all of Rabelais’ books, that allows the text to never fully yield to either emptiness or to plenitude. Furthermore, in the prologue of the *Quart Livre*, Rabelais gives a central place to the concept of *mediocrité* in the Latin sense of the word *mediocritas*, that is to say the happy medium between the extremes of squandering and famine.¹⁶² In short, Rabelais tries to strike a balance between Cornucopia and the visions of emptiness and lack, whether in the context of an imaginary

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 673; 562. Although Frame translates “tripes” with gut, one needs to recall the importance of “tripes”, of course, in *Gargantua*.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 16; 14.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 682; 573.

¹⁶² Ibid., 525. For a detailed analysis, see Todd Reeser, *Moderating Masculinity in Early Modern Culture*, Chapel Hill: U.N.C. Department of Romance Languages, 2006, in particular Chapter 4, devoted to the *Quart Livre*.

New World or that of a fictional kingdom of France.¹⁶³ In Camilla J. Nilles's reading of the prologue of the *Quart Livre*, we find the formulation of a hypothesis on how to understand the concept of mediocrity, relating it deeply to the paradox of scarcity and plenitude:

All are narratives of lack. They begin with a "soubhait", an initial want, need or desire, the only mode of human experience which the prologue ever honors with the title "médiocre," repeatedly associating moderation with absence. Lack, in turn, generates the activity necessary to fill it.¹⁶⁴

Desire, absence and presence are thus linked in this conception of a moderate text.

Furthermore, Nilles's analysis seems to derive from Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*.

Indeed, the Rabelaisian text illustrates the idea of *différance* that Derrida develops in his book:

Sans la possibilité de la différence, le désir de la présence comme telle ne trouverait pas sa respiration. Cela veut dire du même coup que ce désir porte en lui le destin de son inassouvissement. La différence produit ce qu'elle interdit, rend possible cela même qu'elle rend impossible.¹⁶⁵

Dissatisfaction is precisely what the Rabelaisian text is afraid of, especially in the character of Penie, and in all those lists that try to achieve exhaustiveness, arguably in vain. *Différance* represents the paradox of emptiness calling for plenitude, of excess necessitating the recourse to *vuidange* - where we hear the French *vider*, to empty, and the modern term for mechanical emptying, oil change, waste pipe. Terence Cave, in his definition of "cornucopia", sees it as a representation of what Derrida calls the

¹⁶³ For a thorough analysis of the figure of cornucopia in Rabelais's works, see, of course, Terence Cave's *The Cornucopian Text*.

¹⁶⁴ Nilles, Camilla J, "Twice-Told Tales in the Prologue to the *Quart Livre*," in *Rabelais in Context, Proceedings of the 1991 Vanderbilt Conference*, Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 1993, 114.

¹⁶⁵ Derrida, Jacques, *De la grammatologie*, Paris: Minuit, 1967, 206.

supplement. The concept of the supplement conveys the paradox that is inherent to the sign itself, in matters of language:

Il y a une nécessité fatale, inscrite dans le fonctionnement même du signe, à ce que le substitut fasse oublier sa fonction de vicariance et se fasse passer pour la plénitude d'une parole dont il ne fait pourtant que *suppléer* la carence et l'infirmité.¹⁶⁶

Quite interestingly, Derrida chooses to define his supplement with the French word *carence*: what a person develops when she fails to have a balanced diet, and lacks iron or magnesium for example. Derrida thus explains the supplement with a figure coming from the language of food and physiological life, an interesting coincidence. Illustrating Derrida, all those images in Rabelais thus both fill in and make up for their existence. In *Des mets et des mots*, Michel Jeanneret gives a medical name to the text's illness: bulimia, making food and wasted food circulate from the table to the body, from the earth to the earth.¹⁶⁷ More than anywhere else, as Michel Beaujour puts it in *Le Jeu de Rabelais*, it is in the "déchets alluvionnaires de l'écriture" [the alluvial waste of the writing] that we are to find the essence of the text.¹⁶⁸ That is especially the case in the numerous lists like that of the "contenances de Quaresmeprenant" [What Quaresmeprenant contains] or that of the sacrifices of food the inhabitants of Gaster's island make to their god.¹⁶⁹ It is there, in pure invention, that is revealed to the reader the essential place of the superfluous, of the wasted (in the sense of squandered) in the literature of a century that had to find a way to deal with the highest amount of spending that had ever existed. In *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold*, a study of abundance and excess in

¹⁶⁶ Derrida, *op. cit.*, 208.

¹⁶⁷ Jeanneret, *op. cit.*, 26.

¹⁶⁸ Beaujour, *op. cit.*, 27.

¹⁶⁹ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 612.

French Renaissance art and architecture, Rebecca Zorach writes that in this period, the nobles came to possess such an abundance of resources that they became super-consumers, building extravagant castles and indulging in hugely excessive feasts.¹⁷⁰ She writes:

In a 1561 law, Charles IX declared that “one of the causes which brings impoverishment to our people and subjects, proceeds from the superfluous expenditures which are made of clothing, as much by men as by women, and from the fact that they attempt with such superfluities to imitate each other, such that it is hard to find any who have a care for their estates, qualities, faculties and powers, to measure themselves according to reason.”¹⁷¹

Their excessive display of wealth is countered by famine and extreme poverty among the people. A few lines below, Zorach exposes a 1576 ordinance by Henri III that demonstrates that there were already factual evidence that the superfluous expenditure of the wealthy resulted in higher prices for other common goods: “the excessiveness of clothing was driving up prices for other types of goods, that is, causing inflation.”¹⁷² It is possible that the notion of wasting, of discarding, of consuming, is at the very center of the conception of Bakhtin’s carnival not because it is absurd, but because it is also the cause for the giants’ *joie de vivre* and creative power in Rabelais. Yet Rabelais precedes by three decades at least the ordinances against consumerism that Zorach collects: is

¹⁷⁰ For more details, see Zorach’s book, *op. cit.*, in particular, p. 184, this quote from an unknown sixteenth-century writer: “Since we must all die one day, to what end are so many goods, so many riches? Let us leave it all, abandon it all, because we will return as we have come; let us leave immediately all the goods of the world, because we will have much more pleasant ones in the other, when we see God face to face, which will rejoice us forever in his pleasant person. Amen.”

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 200-1. The quote is taken from Antoine Fontanon, *Les edicts et ordonnances des rois de France depuis Lovys VI dit le Gros iusques a present...* Paris: Gabin Michel, 1611, 984. The French original speaks of “despenses superflües” and “superfluitez” in general.

¹⁷² Ibid., Zorach still relies on Fontanon, 993: “Et les roturiers & commun populaire font telle despence de leurs habits, qu’ils sont contrains de suruendre leurs marchandises: dont procede en partie la grande cherté des viures & autres marchandises necessaires à l’vsage de l’homme.” [And the commoners and common people spend so much on their clothes, that they are forced to oversell their merchandise: this is partly the cause for the very high cost of food supplies and other goods that are necessary for man’s use.]

Rabelais's expression of an early modern consumerism then a reflection of his time – somewhere between denouncing and celebrating such expenditures – or does it announce that they are coming? All we can be certain of is that superfluous expenditures are very much emphasized in Rabelais's works, and that they will come to be denounced a few decades later as a cause for a greater impoverishment of the lower classes of society.

There is an ecology of the text in Rabelais that discloses a certain conception of the relationship of man with his environment. This ecology is at stake most particularly in liminal spaces: from the mouth to the anus, but also through male and female genitalia, the body is, first and foremost, in communication and in continuity with its environment, since it is made of tubes, pipes, alternating between states of emptiness or plenitude. Far from being a purist, Rabelais nevertheless develops an idealized version of man's relationship to his environment: the consumption of food and its excretion, once it has been transformed by the process of digestion, partakes in the "salubre et stomachal" [salutary and stomachal] utopia, where man sees the world as a balance between opposite elements to which he himself contributes.¹⁷³ Abundance is thus not so much a symbol of squandering but one of happiness and plenitude. Similarly, excrement and *ordure* are not visions of chaos or crisis but signs of salubrity.

Several observations must be made regarding a preliminary, environmental reading of *Gaster* and *gaster* in Rabelais. Through all those images of circularity and communicative tubes between the inside of the body and the outside of the world, there is

¹⁷³ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 448. It is difficult to translate, and Frame only resorts to "it's good for your health and stomach" (351). The English "stomachal" exists and is used in the late sixteenth-century, as the OED indicates, meaning "good for the stomach," although this usage ceases in the eighteenth century.

one thing that the Rabelaisian text seems to refuse unequivocally: the closing, what in French we call *clôture*, with the double meaning of closing and of fences. Panurge thus defends a nature that, to him, created the body “n’y appousant porte ne clousture aulcune.”¹⁷⁴ In an environmental reading as I define it, this would have something to do with the familiarity of the world to the human being. It seems as if something happened around the time that Rabelais wrote to unsettle and effectively disorient the familiarity between space and bodies. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed establishes orientation as depending on the bodily inhabitation of space: “The world of inhabiting space involves a dynamic negotiation between what is familiar and unfamiliar [...]”¹⁷⁵ Her conception of bodies extending into space, of “the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places” resonates with a certain idea of the environmental relation, one that, despite feeling modern at the time Sara Ahmed writes, also resonates as profoundly ancient. In many ways, the Rabelaisian text forges a queer phenomenology, in the way she defines it. She insists on the “intercorporeal aspects of bodily dwelling,” while Rabelais stages the communication between all these bodies, human and nonhuman, on multiple occasions: the *contenences* [the capacities or countenances] of Quaresmeprenant, the walls of Paris, the *propos torcheculatif* are all illustrations of the fact that “spaces are not exterior to bodies.” One could even claim it to be a constant of all the books: what if, indeed, the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 401; 304. The full quote is from the *Tiers Livre*, in Pantagruel’s argumentation: “Nature me semble non sans cause nous avoir formé aureilles ouvertes, n’y appousant porte ne clousture aulcune, comme a faict es oeilz, langue, et aultres issues du corps” [“Nature seems to me to have formed us not without cause with our ears open, setting on them no gate or closure whatever as she did with the eyes, tongue, and other openings in our bodies.”]

¹⁷⁵ See Introduction for details on *Queer Phenomenology*. Ahmed, *op. cit.*, 8.

focus was not so much on waste, in the way Bakhtin imagines it, but on the peculiar environmental relationship? Is not waste also about familiarity and infamiliarity?¹⁷⁶

If such were the case, as I shall demonstrate further, it would signify that Rabelais, in no less significant way than Montaigne did decades after, deeply feels the disorientation of the French Renaissance environment: seeking to feed and provide for all, fearing diseases and the contagion of other bodies, uncontrollable famines, but most of all, coming to terms with the undeniable fact that men know so little about what surrounds them beyond their immediate dwelling place. Essentially, Rabelais represents consumption as a movement that claims not only objects but also spaces, that, even, incorporates nonhuman bodies. This is shown by the visible concern for spending wisely. Waste functions in the principle of the communicating vessels, enhanced by the “solution de continuité,” the emphasis on the interdependence of all bodies, and the fluidity among these bodies, human and nonhuman. The juxtaposition of empty spaces with saturated ones, in this way, illustrates the fact that waste, in the French Renaissance, already represents the imposition of a lack on other bodies. It is in this context that I read the transatlantic, compensatory representations of excess.

II. Is Satire the Tone of Ecology? The Nativity Scenes between Feast and Famine

Both the nativity scenes that Rabelais places at the beginning of his first two books establish the balance of excess and lack inherent in the notion of waste and the compensatory force at play in any representation of the environment in the books. To

¹⁷⁶ See, notably, Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger* and Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror*.

many, and perhaps it explains Berrong's conviction about *Pantagruel* not fitting at all with the rest of the text, the birth of Gargantua seems to erase and efface the birth of Pantagruel: the latter was born in an environmental crisis of drought and famine, the former, in the most recent books of the two, in the middle of a feast. The visible ambivalence of waste, however, tells a different story.

Far from being either the only book that fits Bakhtin's views entirely, or the book that is dissonant with the rest, *Pantagruel* sets the stage for a conception of the human relationship with the environment that remains constant for the rest of the narrative. Quite plainly, that conception seems to be that there is no constant to speak of, and that the environment is necessarily unstable; Rabelais's text is deeply embedded in the Platonic tradition. The very title of the novel, and name of its main character throughout—apart from the second book focusing on the life of his father, the third and fourth books also have Pantagruel as their hero figure – hints at a change, meaning, in the very explanation of the narrator, that everything is *altered*: “Car *Panta* en Grec vault autant à dire comme tout, et *Gruel* en langue Hagarene vault autant comme alteré, voulant inferer, que à l'heure de sa nativité le monde estoit tout alteré.” [“for *panta*, in Greek, amounts to saying “all” and *gruel* in Hagarene amounts to “thirsty”; meaning to signify that at the time of his nativity the earth was all thirsty [...]]”¹⁷⁷ Bakhtin, just like Rabelais's biographer Madeleine Lazard, pays great attention to the fact that there actually was a terrible drought in the year that Rabelais was probably writing *Pantagruel*, 1532, and that, therefore, it is the popular character of Pantagruel that Rabelais chose, instead of

¹⁷⁷ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 224; 142. Here, it would be important to keep “altéré” as “altered,” since it covers a more extended signification than merely “thirsty.”

many potential others from folk tales.¹⁷⁸ Yet this does not matter as much as the fact that, out of all the ways Rabelais could have chosen to begin his epic narrative of the life of Pantagruel, he wrote what is one of the first representations of an environmental crisis in early modern literature. By that, I mean that there were plenty of representations of droughts and famines in folk tales, but it had not yet been the topic of a narrative, and even less, the foundational episode of a whole book.¹⁷⁹ It was more regional, local in perception than the universal drought Rabelais unfolds in “De la nativité du tresredoubté Pantagruel:”

Vous noterez qu'en icelle année feut seicheresse tant grande en tout le pays de Africque, que passerent .XXXVI. moys, troys sepmaines, quatre jours, treze heures, et quelque peu dadvantaige sans pluye, avec chaleur de soleil si vehemente que toute la terre en estoit aride.
[[...] you must note that there was such a great drought that year in all the land of Africa that there passed thirty-six months three weeks four days thirteen hours and a little bit more without rain, with the heat of the sun so violent that the whole earth was parched.]¹⁸⁰

Far from merely exaggerating the length of the real drought, Rabelais expands its scope: the fictional drought comes from Africa to contaminate, so to speak, the whole world: it is “toute la terre” that was turned into a desert. First, the text focuses on nonhuman elements, going from the earth itself to trees, and then animals:

Car il n'estoit arbre sus terre qui eust ny feuille ny fleur, les herbes estoient sans verdure, les rivières taries, les fontaines à sec, les pauvres poissons delaissez de leurs propres elemens [...], et aultres bestes l'on trouvoit par les champs mortes la gueulle baye.
[[...]for there was no tree above ground that had either leaf or flower. The grasses had no verdure, the streams and springs were dried up; the poor fish deserted by

¹⁷⁸ Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, 326.

¹⁷⁹ For details on hunger and scarcity from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, see Pleij, Herman, *Dreaming of Cockaigne*: “Hunger and scarcity almost always begin with very bad weather conditions. Protracted frost or unremitting rain, floods, and storms can cause a harvest to fail,” 102.

¹⁸⁰ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 222; 141.

their elements [...] and other animals, were found dead all over the fields, their throats gaping.]

Obviously, the long, dramatic enumeration from the least important objects (trees, animals) towards the most important, “au regard des hommes” [“as regards men”] is an element of satire, reversing the order of importance that Renaissance Humanism granted, even more than before, to men. This particular chapter, in fact, functions extremely well, precisely, as a satire of anthropocentrism, at a time that did not have a term for it.¹⁸¹ The text gives voice to otherwise silent animals, who play the part of men in the drought, “vagans et crians par la terre horriblement” [“wandered screaming horribly about the land”] and it also animates them, whereas logic and science dictate that, without water, fishes would die instantly, instead of being able to err and cry around the earth. In the very next paragraph, men appear, only to be immediately dismissed as equal to animals: the “pauvres poissons” [“the poor fish”] evoke a similar satirical tone as “au regard des hommes, c’estoit la grande pitié” [“As regards men, it was most pitiful.”] Moreover, they are compared to animals themselves, “tirans la langue comme levriers qui ont couru six heures” [“you would have seen them with their tongues hanging out, like greyhounds that have run for six hours”]. It could even be said, perhaps, that the sophistication of the comparison resides in the fact that, precisely, men are the ones who usually submit greyhounds to races.

Yet, in the middle of such a crisis, the text’s central preoccupation with waste comes to the forefront more subtly than during the many episodes that stage the excess

¹⁸¹ Man would be placed at the center of the universe as opposed to, in the case of the sixteenth-century, God, even though the secular consequences of humanism will come much later. For an overview of the legacy of Renaissance humanism for modern and then postmodern antihumanist philosophies, see the excellent introduction to *Early Modern Humanism and Postmodern Antihumanism* by Jan Miernowski, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

that Bakhtin emphasizes in his study, what he calls the lower bodily stratum. After having compared men to dogs, thirst being the great equalizer of this nativity scene, Rabelais refocuses the narrative to what humans can do to face such whims of nature as droughts: “Toute la contrée estoit à l’ancre, c’estoit pitoyable cas, de veoir le travail des humains pour se garentir de ceste horrificque *alteration*” [“The whole country was at anchor. It was a piteous thing to see the travail of humans to protect themselves from this horrific drought.”]¹⁸² Thus, whereas the nativity scene is usually read as the relative victory of abundance over famine – since Pantagruel brings out of the womb with him a cornucopia of salted food – the reader should not overlook the reflection on man’s position in the face of natural disasters they can do nothing against.¹⁸³ The theme of pity is iterated several times, from the “pauvres poissons” to the “grande pitié” [“it was most pitiful”] of seeing men with their tongues out, to the “pitoyable cas” [“it was a piteous thing”]. On a similar but absurd vein, Rabelais satirizes the lack of water by emphasizing the protection of “eae benoiste” [“the holy water”] in churches, the consumption of which church officials have to prevent. The last sentence of the paragraph exposes a principle that is opposite to wastefulness, thus contrasting with the *marque de fabrique* of the rest of the narrative: “affin que rien ne se perdist” [“so that none of it should be lost.”]¹⁸⁴ The labor of men, “le travail des humains,” attempting to protect themselves from “ceste horrificque alteration,” is inherently vain, and thus ridiculous.

¹⁸² Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 223; 141. My emphasis; it should be noted, once more, that the original emphasized a wider sense of alteration than a mere drought.

¹⁸³ The victory is relative because, in fact, the “salted” meats do little to resolve the lack of water. If anything, they exacerbate this lack, but in the middle of an ambivalent abundance.

¹⁸⁴ Of course, my translation would say “should be wasted” instead of “lost.”

Such a passage reveals, in fact, the depth and accuracy of satire as the genre and tone in which to portray but also to think the environmental crisis. That is perhaps one of the main points that make the works of Rabelais significant for modern environmental criticism: modernity, at least as it is usually depicted in ecocriticism, has arguably lost the capacity to ridicule an otherwise dark situation. Upon several occasions in Timothy Morton's body of work, one feels the intuition of something like the necessary sense of humor to apprehend the environmental thought. Attempting to formulate the philosophy of our times in the face of climate change, Timothy Morton sketches, progressively between *Ecology Without Nature*, *The Ecological Thought*, and *Dark Ecology*, a different definition of ecology from that used by the first wave of ecocritics: it cannot be green, utopian, or simplistic, and must instead recognize the complexity of "everyday relationships between humans and nonnhumans."¹⁸⁵ Morton moves from melancholy as a defining tone of his ecological thought – he declares ecology "stuck between melancholy and mourning" – to the adjective "dark", which he refers to the same darkness as that of the genre of "film noir."¹⁸⁶ He also denounces that the usual conception of ecology leaves some words behind, which he deems "leftover words": they are "negativity, introversion, femininity, writing, mediation, ambiguity, darkness, irony, fragmentation, sickness."¹⁸⁷ The joining of darkness and irony hints, despite Morton's avoidance of the familiarity, at another dark tone, which could arguably be that of dark humor, or black comedy. Later on, in another suggestion of tone and genre, Morton declares "Perhaps the ecological

¹⁸⁵ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 2.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 94 for melancholy, 16 for film noir, because, in the genre of "film noir," just like in the environment, "Noir narrator begins investigating a supposedly external situation only to realize later that he's implicated in it."

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 16.

thought is picaresque – wandering from place to place, open to random encounters.”¹⁸⁸

The picaresque also happens to be, in many ways – not the least of them being social satire and scenes of low life – a literary genre equivalent to the work of Rabelais in Spanish Golden Age literature.¹⁸⁹ Once more, however, Morton omits the satirical potentiality of his own ideas, condemning his ecological thought to a sinister tone.

Yet, the elasticity of black comedy, just like the endless renewal and death in Bakhtin’s analysis, is inherent to Rabelais, who cannot be read as merely a comedic author.¹⁹⁰ The text establishes the depth and seriousness of the drought, only to declare, in one sentence that stands on its own in between longer paragraphs, “O que bien heureux fut en icelle année celluy qui eut cave fresche et bien garnie.”¹⁹¹ Just like the labor of men consisted earlier in not wasting anything, “affin que rien ne se perdist,” the solution to droughts in general appears to be the stewarding of resources in a way that leaves one with a reserve. In the episode, however, the drought does not end, but reaches a climax, when the earth starts to sweat out salted water, while people assume “que la terre supplioit au deffault.” [and that the earth was making up for the lack]¹⁹² Before the birth of Pantagruel, Badebec delivers “dromadaires,” that is to say, animals typical of the

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 48.

¹⁸⁹ Erik Camayd-Freixas calls the picaresque Rabelais’s successor, “by way of Menippean satire,” in “From Epic to Picaresque: The Colonial Origins of the Latin American Novel,” in *The Picaresque Novel in Western Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Neopicaresque*, ed. J.A. Garrido Ardila, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

¹⁹⁰ For more, see Bernd Renner, *Difficile est saturam non scribere: l’herméneutique de la satire rabelaisienne*, Genève: Droz, 2007.

¹⁹¹ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 223.

¹⁹² Ibid., 224. The Derridean potentiality of such a quote is not lost in translation. It is however lost on Frame, who misunderstands the original and translates the last proposition in the opposite meaning: “And the poor folk began to rejoice, as if it had been a thing very profitable for them; some even said that there was not one drop of moisture in the air from which any rain might fall, and the earth did not supply the default of that” (142). The meaning is in fact that the earth does supply, which the air is unable to do at that moment.

desert, themselves carrying salted meats and onions. There are a few ways of interpreting this: on the one hand, Pantagruel is born in the middle of a drought with a cornucopia of salted meats, the common characteristic of which is to provoke a more severe thirst. This is necessarily unsustainable, in the middle of a drought. On the other, the midwives see in that abundance of salted meats a sign that the drought is about to end. In any case, the poetics of compensation are already visible, insuring that the drought is not permanent and can be reversed. Arguably, in Rabelais, there are always two directions that the crisis could equally take: despair or joy. In a similar tone, faced with the ecological crisis of the twenty-first century, perhaps we are all like Gargantua at the beginning of the next chapter, who fails to know “s’il devoit plorer pour le dueil de sa femme, ou rire pour la joye de son filz” [“whether he was to weep in mourning for his wife, or laugh aloud for joy over his son.”]¹⁹³

The other “nativity” scene, in *Gargantua*, unsurprisingly shares a lot of the same characteristics with that of *Pantagruel*, in the sense that it is also the satire of what I would call an environmental event, a moment in the life of the people *in* the environment that goes out of the ordinary, daily life: as such, both a spectacular drought and a moveable feast qualify as extra-ordinary environmental events, even though the former is an unexpected event that humans had nothing to do with, whereas the latter is dictated by the rhythm of the seasons, but also by that of man-made agriculture.¹⁹⁴ While Pantagruel’s birth was deemed a “nativité” – in a parody of the scene of the birth of Christ – Gargantua’s can be classified, in a more pagan, mythical reference, into the

¹⁹³ Ibid., 225; 143.

¹⁹⁴ In this sense of ‘extraordinary,’ the environmental event also does not have to be sudden or punctual. See, for a parallel, chapter III on “Des Cannibales” and the “agitation extraordinaire.”

category of strange births of Greek heroes and demi-gods.¹⁹⁵ The chapter is entitled “Comment Gargantua nasquit en façon bien estrange;” [“How Gargantua was born in a very strange fashion”] he indeed “sortit par l’aureille senestre” [“came out through the left ear.”]¹⁹⁶ forced to do thus because Gargamelle had been given a “restrinctif si horrible, que tous ses larrys tant feurent oppilez et reserrez [...]” [“a restraining so horrible that all her sphincters were contracted and tightened up [...]”] In other words, it seems that, together with the sphincter, all of Gargamelle’s perineal muscle are paralyzed. This differs significantly from *Pantagruel*’s earlier parade of food. In *Gargantua*, the abundance has happened before the birth, so that the compensating force blocks the usual flow and nature of things: Gargamelle is thus unable to excrete the tripe, and simultaneously unable to give birth to her son through the usual ways.

In *Pantagruel*, the drought represents an obstruction of resources, for instance, followed by a more careful stewarding of them – with the paragraph of the blessed water, exemplifying in this way the regulatory movement I mentioned above. In *Gargantua*, what provokes the obstruction of Gargamelle’s fundament is an excessive consumption of tripe in the fourth chapter, itself inserted before another moment of flow, the famed “Les propos des bienyvres” [“The palaver of the potted”] Significantly, the feast occurs precisely because of an attempt to efficiently manage the resources: they slaughter a great quantity (more than three hundred thousands) of oxen to be salted – that is to say, preserved to be eaten during the winter – on the day of carnival, “mardy gras.” The downside, or upside, to such a practice is that there are parts of the oxen that cannot be

¹⁹⁵ Rabelais blends the mythological references to Minerve, Bacchus, Castor and Pollux, who also had strange births, with other giants of the French folk tale canon, Rocquetaillade and Croquemouche.

¹⁹⁶ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 22; 20.

preserved nor kept long, “Car elles feussent pourries. Ce qui sembloit indecent.” [“for they would have rotted, which seemed indecent.”]¹⁹⁷ One could assume that the indecency implies a satirical tone, given how wasteful the giants already seem to be, after all of *Pantagruel*, or even, given that one could consider such food to be already “pourries” since it is full of excrement. Yet, just like in the latter’s nativity scene, there is an inescapable care for saving and preserving the resources that are available: *Gargantua*’s “sans rien y perdre” recalls the “affin que rien ne se perdist” of *Pantagruel*. Only in appearance are both nativity scenes complete opposite representations of abundance on the one hand, and famine on the other: like many other episodes in Rabelais’s books, they both contain very careful and decidedly ambivalent representations of one and the other.

Therefore, the satire does not prevent the setting up of an ambivalent notion of waste, around which a whole, perhaps new, conception of the environment can be drawn. There is arguably a lot to be gained from reading Rabelais between Timothy Morton, an ecocriticism scholar who avoids the notion of comedy and humor, and Mikhail Bakhtin, a Soviet scholar who asserts the joyful time of Rabelais’s world but is unaware or lacks the words for ecological concerns. Could Bakhtin’s interpretation be more reliable and useful if it were to actually put into practice not only the joyful dimension of Rabelais’s work, but also the corresponding, compensatory and darker movement? On the other hand, could Morton’s dark ecology be more coherent and a more efficient discourse for our times if it were to grasp the deeply satirical irony that lies around us, in the environmental relation?

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 17; 14.

As mentioned above, few are the scholars who have remarked on how ecological some of Bakhtin's theories sound. When they do, and even though they focus mostly on "folk-festive and carnival culture," and, as such, mainly on his work on Rabelais's world, they nevertheless tend to limit their arguments to the "green social theory" in the writings of Bakhtin¹⁹⁸. They fail to note that, regardless of how influenced Bakhtin was by socialism, the environmental focus is omnipresent in the very text that he studies: Bakhtin's ecological insights may have a few causes, but it is the Rabelaisian text that contains all of these in potentiality. Michael Gardiner, for instance, in "Ecology and Carnival," suggests several points of tension between Bakhtin and ecological theory. He writes that Bakhtin's work contains "elements that are compatible with several recent critiques of "human-centered" instrumental reason,"¹⁹⁹ or that dialogism is a "model of the world" "that stresses continual interaction and interconnectedness, relationality, and the permeability of (symbolic and physical) boundaries."²⁰⁰ If all of this rings true, however, they are mostly so in the Rabelaisian text itself: the fact that bodies, whether human or nonhuman, are entirely permeable is just another formulation of the intuition of a natural flow exposed above.

The permeability of boundaries, and, even more, the clear insistence on opening or closing up such boundaries, is precisely a central structure in Gargantua's birth, with Gargamelle's fundament being at times too open – falling out, releasing excrement, one assumes – or too closed – so that the infant has to come out of her ear. Yet Gardiner

¹⁹⁸ Gardiner, *op. cit.*, 766. He writes that he focuses on the works on Rabelais "not only because they are the most "utopian" and politically engaged of his texts, but also because they contain his most explicit ruminations on the subject of humanity and nature."

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 765.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 766.

claims that there is “no sustained attention to the issue of human-nature relations” in Bakhtin’s work, whereas I would strongly argue the exact opposite. If Bakhtin establishes early on a principle of the bodily element as deeply positive, of arguably greater interest and with better accuracy, he writes that “it is opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world; it makes no pretense to renunciation of the earthly, or independence of the earth and the body.”²⁰¹ This, much more than the enumeration of egalitarian communities wishing to return to the Golden Age of harmony with nature, represents Bakhtin’s ecological insight into the Rabelaisian text. At repeated times, the human body *cannot* separate from the other bodies. More importantly perhaps, the human body, despite the overwhelming anthropocentrism of Renaissance Humanism, displays no apparent wish to be distinguishable and distinct from the rest of the bodies.

This is the case, for instance, when the human body tries to imprint on its surrounding objects in the “propos torcheculatif” [“your ass-wipative discourse”] of young Gargantua.²⁰² One should note, moreover, that this is the passage that Berrong utilizes to refute Bakhtin’s reading of the lower bodily stratum as still being the driving force in *Gargantua* – let us recall here that Berrong claims that the lower bodily stratum is only really present in *Pantagruel*. For him, the “propos torcheculatif” demonstrates, instead, that Gargantua gets clean, with a new focus on hygiene, and therefore separates from the excessive focus on waste that was present before in the narrative: “In short, the values and views of popular culture on the acceptability of dirt in general and excrement in particular, so clearly evident in *Pantagruel*, have just as clearly been excluded from

²⁰¹ Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, 19.

²⁰² Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 41; 36.

Gargantua by the midpoint of the novel.”²⁰³ Waste, however, has never been a question of a lack of hygiene in *Pantagruel* or *Gargantua*, which would be a rather anachronistic reading, or one that gives too much weight to an expired view of medieval times as dark and dirty, against a proper and enlightened Renaissance. In this particular text, waste blurs the distinction between the human and his surroundings. It also reflects the extensive notion of waste: the swab is wasteful in many ways: because Gargantua tries so many of them, because he mainly prioritizes comfort and luxury as a criterium for the best swab, and because it is neither an expedient nor an efficient invention – despite Gargantua claiming otherwise.

The passage also refutes Gardiner’s claim that Rabelais’s time had a much less domineering attitude toward nature – the usual, clichéd assumption made of early modern approaches to nature as opposed to those of modernity. On the contrary, if one passage demonstrates the utilitarian, domineering approach to nature that humans exhibited at the time, it would certainly be this one: Gargantua picks up every single nonhuman object he can find, whether manufactured (pieces of clothing made of various types of cloth, accessories like a bag and a handkerchief) or animal (a cat, a chicken, a hare and, the final *torchecul*, “un oyzon bien dumeté” [“a good downy gosling”]) or vegetables and herbs from a garden.²⁰⁴ All these objects are, precisely, instrumentalized, manufactured, or domesticated by humans, somehow. If anything, the chapter constitutes a list of domestic articles that could be found in any house. The herbs and vegetables were cultivated for food or for medicinal purpose, the clothes fabricated and commercialized, the animals bred for food or hunting. The chapter is in fact an accurate representation of a

²⁰³ Berrong, *op. cit.*, 28.

²⁰⁴ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 41; 37.

growingly consumerist society, based on comfort and leisure.²⁰⁵ Gargantua wipes himself with satin, and the luxurious ornament hurts him: “mais la dorure d’un tas de spheres de merde qui y estoient m’escorcherent tout le derriere.” Moreover, the articles of clothing are also meant to hide the body away, an idea that some of them actually display in their very name [“chief” meaning the head]: “cachecoul” [“a neckerchief”; literally, a hide neck],²⁰⁶ “couvrechief.” [“a kerchief”; literally, a hide-head]²⁰⁷ Everything that stands between the human body and its most simple connection to the rest of the world ends up covered in excrement, therefore effectively blurring the distinction.

Waste does appear to be at least a thematic thread, if not a central problem, in *Gargantua* just as much as in *Pantagruel*. Impressions like that of Berrong, claiming the diminution of images of popular culture through the growing “acceptability of dirt,” merely read the text on the surface, for traces of material waste. If Bakhtin’s lower bodily stratum does not completely encompass the concept of waste as I define it (as environmental, philosophical and phenomenological), it is in great part because Bakhtin fails to see the place of the New World in the text, and, as a result, its importance in assembling this overwhelming sense of waste.

III. Imagining and Managing the New World

The fact that Rabelais writes about the New World is far from being ignored in the scholarship. Geographical clues abound: Pantagruel’s mother, Badebec, is the daughter of the king of Utopia, and after her death, Gargantua travels there for a more or

²⁰⁵ For more on the notion of an early modern consumerism or capitalist society, see Introduction. See also Chandra Mukerji, *From Graven Images*.

²⁰⁶ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 39; 34.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 41; 36.

less long-term stay.²⁰⁸ The *Quart Livre*, generally considered to be the last of the books authored by Rabelais, is entirely set at sea, in the North of the Atlantic Ocean. In *L'exotisme américain américain dans la littérature française au XVIème siècle*, Gilbert Chinard makes the subtle observation that, since it is a fact that Thomas More has located his *Utopia* “quelque part entre les îles découvertes par Christophe Colomb et Améric Vespuce et le pays de Cathay” [somewhere between the islands discovered by Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci, and the country of Cathay], it is therefore certainly significant that Rabelais chose to place his own narration there.²⁰⁹ By the first chapter of the *Quart Livre*, it is clear that the exotic focus has shifted from an uncharacterized, generic Orient to a specific America, which most scholars deem is that of Jacques Cartier.

Originally, as Abel Lefranc remarks in *Les navigations de Pantagruel*, the rest of the books as Rabelais envisioned them at the end of *Pantagruel* in the 1533 edition was going to focus on the New World in more direct and explicit ways than they arguably did in the end. Having already taken Pantagruel on a navigation, he announces where his character's next trips will take him in the next book:

vous voyrez comment Panurge feut marié et cocqu dez le premier moys de ses nopces. Et comment Pantagruel passa les monts Caspies, et comment il naviga par la mer Athlanticque, et deffit les Canibales et conquesta les isles de Perlas.

²⁰⁸ Curiously, this question has not come up in Rabelaisian studies, to our knowledge: Lefranc does mention off-handedly that at the time Pantagruel leaves on his voyage in the *Tiers Livre*, that “Il n’y a aucune incertitude, comme on l’a remarqué plus haut, sur ce fait que Gargantua et Pantagruel se trouvent tous deux en France, c’est-à-dire en Touraine, au moment où se décide ce grand voyage” (37). However, in *Pantagruel*, Gargantua sends his well known letter to his son “de Utopie ce dix septiesme jour du moys de mars” (Rabelais 245).

²⁰⁹ Chinard, Gilbert, *L'exotisme américain dans la littérature française au XVIe siècle d'après Rabelais, Ronsard, Montaigne*, Paris, Hachette et cie, 1911, 51. For more details on the location of *Utopia*, see Abel Lefranc's analysis p. 16.

[how Panurge got married, and was cuckolded right from the first month of his marriage; [...] how he [Pantagruel] sailed over the Atlantic Ocean, and defeated the cannibals, conquered the Perlas islands [...].]²¹⁰

Lefranc then recalls that Rabelais intended to make Pantagruel go on a voyage around the world, and notes that he seems, come *Gargantua*, to have forgotten his own idea. In the *Quart Livre*, therefore, the voyage, instead of going to Columbus's America – that is to say, through Columbus's itinerary and to the islands that he has discovered (las Perlas) – takes the itinerary of Jacques Cartier.²¹¹ Yet it would be a mistake to consider the focus on the New World to be limited to a mere explicit geographical reference, or the supposed admiration of Rabelais for Jacques Cartier, whom he may have met in St Malo once, as some carefully collected evidence could not do more than suggest²¹². I would argue, instead, that the New World taints most of the narrative early on, and is a continuous thread, demonstrating perhaps that Rabelais and his readers were likely to have been affected by the discovery, in various ways. It begins with the world contained inside of Pantagruel's mouth.

“Jesus (dis je) il y a icy un nouveau monde” [“ “Jesus,” said I, “then there's a new world here?””] the narrator exclaims upon discovering what is hidden beyond Pantagruel's teeth.²¹³ While the scholarship generally recognized the importance of this

²¹⁰ Lefranc, *op. cit.*, 25; this is the exact quote from Lefranc, which apparently lacks some words. In Rabelais, see p. 336; 244.

²¹¹ Details of the scholarly interpretation of Rabelais's relationship with Jacques Cartier can be found in Lefranc, Abel, *Les navigations de Pantagruel*. For instance: “Il est sûr que s'il a choisi Saint-Malo [as a location for Gargantua's “arsenal de Thalasse”], c'est en raison de liens qui existaient entre cette ville et Jacques Cartier, personnage avec lequel tous les critiques s'accordent à identifier le pilote principal de Pantagruel nommé Jamet Brayet ou Brayer,” p. 40. Lefranc's work also contains the most precise bibliography on Rabelais's interests in navigating and the New World.

²¹² See above, footnote number 4.

²¹³ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 331; 239.

chapter, the second to last before *Pantagruel*'s conclusion, it is chiefly because it is the only time in the whole narrative – including all the books – that the narrator becomes a character of the story.²¹⁴ In Gérard Genette's classification, established in *Figures III*, Alcofrybas, the heterodiegetic narrator, becomes, in this chapter, a homodiegetic narrator, changing from a silent, invisible omniscient narrator to one who walks around in his main character's mouth and even has a conversation with him.²¹⁵ This is undeniably important, however it is even more significant for the present argument that this happens precisely in the first chapter in the book series to refer clearly to the discovery of the New World. The quote recalls, decades later, Montaigne's declaration in the middle of "Des coches": "Notre monde vient d'en trouver un autre." [Our world has just discovered an other]²¹⁶ Just like Columbus did not expect a whole new continent to stand in the way between Europe and Asia, the narrator did not expect to find a whole new world when he stumbled into Pantagruel's gigantic mouth. In this way, the chapter can be read as a compelling satire of the travel narratives that flooded libraries around that time, but also, at the same level as Montaigne's New World chapters, as a no less profound reflection on what it means to live through the epistemological and existential crisis of seeing the world upside-down, or rather, in fact, as I would argue, a horizontal inversion instead of vertical. The disorientation happens very much on the horizontal, transatlantic ground, from West to

²¹⁴ See for instance: "La Bouche et l'estomac des géants," Charles A. Lemeland, *Romance Notes*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Autumn, 1974), pp. 183-189, or Andrea Frisch, "Quod vidimus testamur: Testimony, Narrative Agency and the World in Pantagruel's Mouth," *French Forum*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (September 1999), pp. 261-283. See also E. Auerbach's canonical reading in *Mimesis*, "Le Monde que renferme la bouche de Pantagruel," Paris: Gallimard, 1968, p. 267-86.

²¹⁵ Genette, Gérard, (1972), *Figures III*, Paris, Seuil, 252. For a detailed account of the presence of Alcofrybas in Rabelais's works, the best summary is in Frisch, Andrea, *Eyewitness*, pp. 66-71, or in her article "Quod vidimus testamur," cited above.

²¹⁶ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 952.

East. The inhabitants of Pantagruel's mouth operate a very similar shift to that of Montaigne's cannibals, applying the critical lens to Europe, instead of to this new world.²¹⁷

In this chapter, the world is split in two, with the "real" one outside, and the parallel one existing inside Pantagruel's mouth. What the narrator sees implies that he is standing on an elevated overlook: "y veiz de grands rochiers, comme les mons des Dannoys, je croy que c'estoient ses dentz, et de grands prez, de grandes forestz, de fortes et grosses villes non moins grandes que Lyon ou Poitiers." ["and I saw great rock formations, like the mountains of the Danes, I think that there were his teeth, and great plains, great forests, big strong cities no less large than Lyon or Poitiers."]²¹⁸ Certainly, a reader cannot expect the landscape description to be realistic, but it is significant that no overlook could ever contain in a single frame the cityscape of several towns as big as Lyon or Poitiers, even at the time. While the fields and forests could fit in any landscape, these "fortes et grosses villes" cannot.

One can discern the motif of the "monde renversé," except that it is more of an alternate, other world; the key notion, in addition to that of novelty with "un nouveau monde" is that of alterity. There are pigeons coming from "l'autre monde" [the other world]²¹⁹: this other could be either the geographical location of Pantagruel's body at the

²¹⁷ See Chinard's introduction to *L'exotisme américain* for details on the perception of the great discoveries over the course of the century. For instance, he cites M. Petit de Juleville from his *Histoire de la Langue et de la Littérature française*: "La découverte de l'Amérique agrandit la terre habitable, et offrit aux Européens une fortune illimitée dans l'avenir et la domination du monde. En même temps la terre, dépossédée du centre qu'elle croyait tenir dans l'Univers, n'était plus qu'un point perdu quelque part dans l'espace illimité," p. vi-vii.

²¹⁸ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 331; 239.

²¹⁹ Note, here, that Frame translates this by the indefinite article, which changes everything: "they come from another world" (239).

moment, the “terres des Dipsodes”- that is to say, neighboring More’s *Utopia*, or the other world that was just discovered by Columbus. For the scholarly doxa, both are the same²²⁰. Even the vocabulary decidedly points at this precise New World, the one beyond the Atlantic: “mais l’on dist bien que hors d’icy y a *une terre neufve* où ilz ont et Soleil et Lune: et tout plein de belles besoignes : mais cestuy cy est plus ancien” [“but they do indeed say that outside of here there’s a new earth where they have both sun and moon, and all sorts of fine carryings-on; but this one is older.”]²²¹ “Terre neufve” is the French name for Newfoundland, already named by European settlers from various countries before the time of Cartier’s exploration. It is as if the text bore the symptoms of the diffuse but nevertheless traumatic encounter with a new continent over the course of the sixteenth-century.

The chapter, second before last in *Pantagruel*, functions as a satire of the popular narratives of exploration that circulated at the time, namely, of Peter Martyr’s *Decades*. It satirizes the reliability of these eye-witness narratives – later mocked again in the *Cinquiemesme Livre*, where Peter Martyr is listed as “cachez derriere une piece de tapisserie en tapinois escrivans de belles besongnes, et tout par Ouy-dire,” [“hiding behind a piece of tapestry and covertly writing fine works, and all by Hearsay”], together with “Jaques Cartier.”²²² The newly characterized narrator plays with the notion of truth and fiction

²²⁰ See above, Chinard’s positioning, p. 30.

²²¹ My emphasis.

²²² A necessary note on the likeliness of Peter Martyr as a source for Rabelais: the *Decades*, first published in 1511, gathered in anthology form the various letters and reports of early exploration of the New World, that is to say, of Central and South America. They were originally letters sent from Peter Martyr to Cardinal Ascanius Sforza, about the voyages of various explorers, including, of course, Christopher Columbus. It is extremely likely that Rabelais would have come across them, or discussed them extensively, at least during one of his visits to the Vatican with the cardinal du Bellay, if not beforehand during his education as a Franciscan monk. In terms of dating, this means that he would have to have come across the *Decades* before he wrote

with the oxymoron, at the very moment in which he materializes himself: “Ce pendent je qui vous fais ces tant veritables contes [...]” [“Meanwhile I, who am telling you these stories so truly”]²²³ While the chronicles of Gargantua and Pantagruel are most definitely never confused with reality, this phrase, placed right before the narrator goes into the other, new world inside the mouth of Pantagruel, is highly significant. Rabelais also builds expectation for the readers, a device used by explorer-writers before. While, for them, it usually takes the form of a slow arrival to the new lands, of long weeks spent at sea, in this case Rabelais chooses the cursing exclamation: “Mais o dieux et deesses, que veiz je là? Juppiter me confonde de sa fouldre trisulque si j’en mens” [“But, O ye gods and goddesses, what did I see there? Jupiter confound me with his three-forked thunder if I lie.”]²²⁴ Similarly, the insistence on “icy,” in the context of an exploratory narrative, seems to satirize the devices used by both Cartier and Thevet in order to give credibility to their work – the narrators are there, *icy* and not, as Franck Lestringant puts it, *géographes de cabinet*.²²⁵ What is therefore satirized above all are the devices used to prove the credibility of these eyewitnesses, but also the general sense of unreliability of any narrative concerning a distant, other, new world, condemned to the “Ouy-dire.”²²⁶

Pantagruel in 1532, whereas he only went to Rome with Jean du Bellay in 1534. In another trail, in the thirtieth chapter of the *Cinquiemesme Livre*, the authorship of which is highly debated, Pierre Tesmoin is listed as one of the figures that the narrator encounters “cachez derriere une piece de tapisserie en tapinois escrivans de belles besongnes, et tout par Ouy-dire,” together with “Jaques Cartier.” See Rabelais, 804; 682.

²²³ Ibid., 330; 239.

²²⁴ Ibid., 331; 239.

²²⁵ The phrase is a favorite of Franck Lestringant’s, who uses it to oppose the practicality of Thevet, and his real travels, to the ignorance of geographers who usually, in the Renaissance, remain in the comfort of their study. The phrase comes up in works such as *L’atelier du cosmographe ou l’image du monde à la Renaissance*, p. 25-43, or *Le huguenot et le sauvage : l’Amérique et la controverse coloniale en France au temps des guerres de religion 1555-1589*, Genève : Droz, 2004, p. 213.

²²⁶ Andrea Frisch analyzes this chapter in *The Invention of the Eyewitness: Witnessing and Testimony in Early Modern France*, Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 2004. See

One should note, furthermore, that the world inside Pantagruel's mouth functions as a double mirror: the obvious one, as it is usually read, is a reflection or inversion of the world outside, with very French referents such as "choulx" and "pigeons." Yet, it also functions as a mirror to the New World, which is, in a *mise en abyme*, where the Dipsodes – and thus Pantagruel's very body at that moment – are supposed to be located: "I'on dit bien que hors d'icy y a une terre neufve [...]" ["but they do indeed say that outside of here there's a new earth"]. In that way, the world of Pantagruel's mouth regulates elements of France – comparisons with French towns like Rouen and Nantes, "dangier de peste" ["danger of plague"], "vendre au marché" ["I take them to sell in the market"], – and devices that are clearly borrowed from exploratory narratives: when introducing the "cité qui est icy derriere" ["the city that is behind here"] the local man explains "Elle a (dist-il) nom Aspharage, et sont Christians, gens de bien, et vous feront grande chere" ["It's name," said he, "is Aspharagos [Gullettown], and they are Christians, good people, and will give you a great time."]²²⁷ It thus stages the reverse of the encounters with natives in the New World: these people are christians, reassuringly "gens de bien," and the civilized aspect of that world contrasts with the wilderness of the New World.

Pantagruel's world displays a market economy that suggests autarky, and it also appears to be just as developed as any other French region: "et là trouvay les plus beaux lieux du monde, beaulx grands jeux de paulme, belles galleries, belles praries, force

in particular p. 70 where she notes, after Terence Cave, the medieval themes and anti-exotic dimension of the episode. She cites Cave, "Travelers and Others: Cultural Connections in the Works of Rabelais," *François Rabelais: Critical Assessments*, ed. Jean-Claude Carron, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995, 39-56 : "The points of reference are European, the religion is Christian, the cabbage planter a good imitation of a French peasant" ("Travelers" 40).

²²⁷ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 331; 239.

vignes, et une infinité de cassines à la mode Italicque par les champs pleins de delices”
 [“and there found the loveliest places in all the world, fine big tennis courts, nice galleries, fair meadows, vines galore, and an infinity of country villas in the Italian style, amid fields full of delights”].²²⁸ How could this not recall Jacques Cartier’s description of the St Laurent estuary, in a very anachronistic remark? Fields, vineyards, prairies full of delights, therefore seem to represent, before Cartier even goes to Terre Neuve, a veritable Cockaigne, evoked inside of Pantagruel’s mouth.²²⁹ These hyperboles and superlatives also will become a topos of Cartier’s *Relations*. It could be enough to suggest that, more than the claim that the *Quart Livre* is inspired by Rabelais’s imagined meeting with Jacques Cartier, there could be a credible claim that Cartier would have read, like so many other Frenchmen at the time, and taken inspiration from its description of a New, other world²³⁰. On another dimension, the description resembles more the future abbey of Theleme than it does the New World as it is known at that time. Already, there is an emphasis on aesthetic pleasure, leisure (with the “jeu de paume” and the “galleries” for strolling), on the influence and superiority of Italian architecture and ornament, with the “cassines à la mode Italicque.”

When referring to “ce pais la,” therefore, Rabelais leaves the reader in doubt as to whether the referent is the world inside Pantagruel’s mouth, or the real New World, that seemingly would have been on everyone’s mouth at the time, or in fact Europe itself. The

²²⁸ Ibid., 332; 240.

²²⁹ There are in fact many suggestions of typical Cockaigne narratives, such as Alcofrybas earning money by sleeping, or the fact that, in a book full of banquets, our narrator does exclaim that he “ne fei[t] oncques telle chere que pour lors” [“and never had it so good as then and there”].

²³⁰ Two years after its original publication, there are already eight more editions of *Pantagruel*, in 1534. See Mireille Huchon’s “Notice,” 1212.

reader needs reminding that, at this moment in the narrative of *Pantagruel*, the characters are situated in Dipsodie, that is to say, Pantagruel's kingdom somewhere in the West, in the New World, as we know from its position as a neighbor of Thomas More's *Utopia*. Such a paradigm shift as the one people lived through in the early decades of the sixteenth century probably signified that talking of an other world would necessarily make the readers think of the actual other world just discovered, as in the lines that end the episode: "Là commencay penser qu'il est bien vray ce que l'on dit, que la moytié du monde ne sçait comment l'autre vit" ["At that point I began to think that it is very true what they say, that half the world doesn't know how the other half lives"]. Behind a well-known episode, where the narrator appears, only to disappear inside Pantagruel's mouth, there lies a reflection on the great paradigm change of the century. Even more, Rabelais focuses his satire on credibility in the description of such new lands, first with the oxymoron "tant veritables contes," and further with the reliability of eye-witness narratives. The idiomatic "on dit" is found contrasted for ironic distance: "Certes (dist il) il n'est mie nouveau: mais l'on dist bien que hors d'icy y a une terre neufve [...]" ["To be sure," said he, "it's hardly new; but they do indeed say that outside of here there's a new earth"].²³¹ Rabelais layers many levels of witnesses, the narrator telling of the "bon homme qui plantoit des choulx" ["a chap who was planting cabbages"] who in turn told him that he heard that there is a new land. The reliability of books written by eyewitnesses is put into question further: "Veu que nul avoit escrit de ce pais là auquel sont plus de .XXV. royaumes habitez, sans les desers, et un gros bras de mer: mais j'en ay composé un grand livre intitulé l'*Histoire des Gorgias*." ["seeing that no one had yet

²³¹ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 331; 239.

written about that country, in which there are over twenty-five inhabited kingdoms, not counting the deserts and one great arm of the sea; but I have composed a book about it entitled *History of the Gorgias*”].²³² How can a book written by “l’auteur” Alcofrybas be any more reliable, or unreliable, to tell “veritables contes,” than mere “on dit” exchanged on the public square? Rabelais, in the depth of a satirical episode, seems to grapple with the vertiginous epistemological crisis provoked by Columbus’s discovery.

The world inside Pantagruel’s mouth seems to assert its own autarky by suggestions of an agricultural system diverse enough that it needs a market economy. Every person the narrator meets earns a living, from the cabbage farmer to the people who get paid to sleep all day. Yet, such an impression is constantly complicated by references to the relationships with the outside world. The only element that the inhabitants of Pantagruel’s mouth observe as coming from the other world, that immediately denounces their existing in a world that is one of several, are the pigeons. The pattern of the narrative in the chapter goes as follows: the narrator walks on, meets someone, hears their descriptions of their own world, which the narrator then goes on to interpret in the larger truth that he only knows because he knows the other world. For instance, the cabbage farmer mentions the pigeons, and the narrator realizes (“Lors je pensay”) that pigeons must be entering Pantagruel’s mouth “pensans que feust un colombier” [“thinking it was a dovecote”].²³³ Immediately after, the narrator meets some guards at a city’s entrance, and they inform him of a plague that has seized the city. For them, it is a “puante et infecte exhalation qui est sortie des abysmes” [“a foul stinking exhalation that had issued from the gulfs not long ago”] but the narrator knows what

²³² Ibid., 333; 240.

²³³ Ibid., 331; 239.

causes it: “Lors je pense et calcule, et trouve que c’estoit une puante halaine qui estoit venue de l’estomach de Pantagruel alors qu’il mangea tant d’aillade [...]” [“Then I thought and calculated, and decided it was a stinking breath that had come from Pantagruel’s stomach when he ate all that garlic sauce”].²³⁴ What is thus invisible to the inhabitants of this world, and only known by the narrator, is the visible relationships between these two worlds, implying causality, but also dependence. It is moreover significant that Rabelais does not mention – throughout the chapter at least – any recycling of what Pantagruel eats and consumes into sustenance for the micro-inhabitants of his body. Food is produced by them and for them. It is only after the narrator comes out of his body that he reveals to Pantagruel, who asks where he found sustenance there: “des plus friands morceaulx qui passoient par vostre gorge j’en prenois le barraige” [“of the choicest morsels that passed down your throat I took my toll”].²³⁵ As for his observations, which would also otherwise complicate the apparent autarky of the inhabitants of this world, he noticeably keeps them to himself – and shares them with the readers.

The explored world, therefore, remains undisturbed by conceptions of its own dependence on another world. The line between world and body is constantly blurred. Attempting to define what he calls the banquet imagery, Bakhtin describes the body’s interaction with the world thus: “The distinctive character of this body is its open unfinished nature, its interaction with the world. These traits are most fully and concretely revealed in the act of eating; the body transgresses here its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world’s

²³⁴ Ibid., 332; 240.

²³⁵ Ibid., 333; 241.

expense.”²³⁶ While a potent analysis of how food consumption functions in Rabelais’s world, the most important part of his observation here is that the corpulence of bodies, that is, the bodies of giants, is “at the world’s expense,” which can be verified as many times as Pantagruel or Gargantua either excessively eats or excessively excretes. Yet it goes further, in the current analysis: in his environmental intuition, Bakhtin actually emphasizes, here, the interdependence of all bodies, human and nonhuman. Any body, human or not, depends on other bodies for its sustenance, and can be either degraded or increased by it. It is this relation, or connectedness, in the sense that Glissant meant for it, that Bakhtin’s thought, but even more, Rabelais’s text is decidedly environmental, but also phenomenological.²³⁷ Therefore, in narrating the exploration of a “human” body, albeit gigantic, as one does the discovery of a strange, distant land, Rabelais suggests that all bodies live at the expense of others, and that autarky is a sham – this will be the lesson of Thélème, as I will expose below. The wasting of resources all over the books is thus not as unilaterally free and gay as Bakhtin suggests, but does involve some sense of responsibility. In fact, this chapter points directly at another “world” that will face problems of management and wastefulness: seeing the narrator fall out of his mouth, and delighted by his joke, he gives him “la chatellenie de Salmiguondin,” on which the *Tiers Livre* precisely begins.²³⁸

²³⁶ Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, 281.

²³⁷ There are many moments in *Poétique de la relation* where Glissant defines his concept. For the present use, perhaps the most significant is this one: “That is very much the image of the rhizome, prompting the knowledge that identity is no longer completely within the root but also in Relation. Because the thought of errantry is also the thought of what is relative, the thing relayed as well as the thing related” (18). See Glissant, Edouard, *The Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997.

²³⁸ Salmiguondin, in the *Tiers Livre*, belongs to Panurge, once more implying that the narrator and Panurge sometimes are the same person.

From Thélème to Salmiguondin

Such a suggestion is not unique in his body of work. Many scholars would certainly agree that, insofar as mentions of overseas travels and other countries are concerned, the principal books to look at would be *Pantagruel* and the *Quart Livre*. *Gargantua*, on the other hand, a prequel that shows the transition between the medieval times and the Renaissance, seems very limited to regional, French spaces and conflicts. The next book, the *Tiers Livre* and its satirical, dialogic questioning of whether Panurge should find himself a wife, would appear similarly unconcerned with matters of colonialization, or navigational exploration and expansion. Yet, it is concerned with matters of spending, in Panurge's praise of wasteful spending and debt. Contrary to such impressions, *Gargantua* and the *Tiers Livre* both evoke such questions in quite meaningful ways: *Gargantua* grapples with what it would mean to live in autarky, with the anti-utopia, Thélème, and the *Tiers Livre* confronts economic matters, a reflection on the need for a careful management of resources.

The anti-abbey Thélème, the series of chapters that close *Gargantua*, differs greatly from the first half of the book, both in tone and in style. Among four books so full of satire, it is quite less satirical, and Bernd Renner, in his thorough study of satire in Rabelais, *Difficile est saturam non scribere*, only mentions Thélème but a few times. In fact, he names Thélème as the moment when the transition from a univocal monological satire of the medieval tradition towards a much more subtle and dialogical satire happens. In a footnote, he writes: "C'est à la fin du *Gargantua*, dans l'épisode de Thélème en général et "l'énigme en prophétie" en particulier que cette transition se manifeste de façon explicite." [It is at the end of *Gargantua*, in the episode of Theleme in general, and

in “A prophetic riddle” in particular that this transition manifests itself explicitly.]²³⁹ On another hand, Richard Berrong takes Thélème as the proof that his theory – that Gargantua matures into a reasonable being progressively as he distances himself from excrement – works. For him, it is partly because Bakhtin fails to be able to incorporate Thélème in his analysis in any significant way that *Rabelais’s World* is so flawed. A key passage, developing a utopia in response to that of Thomas More, Thélème cannot be left aside because it is, he claims, “not in line with Rabelais’s style and ideas,” adding that Pantagruel and Panurge would probably not be allowed in Thélème.²⁴⁰ Perhaps Thélème has nothing to do with the lower bodily stratum, yet the abbey in various ways embodies a more general questioning of autarky, management, leisure and expenditure of the resources. These seems to be, at that point in the *Chronicles*, the overwhelming concerns of the author, inaugurating also the beginning of the *Tiers Livre*.

Indeed, the abbey’s very first “item” of importance is pronounced by Gargantua, after the monk asks him to institute his religion contrary to all the others: “il n’y fauldra ja bastir murailles au circuit : car toutes aultres abbayes sont fierement murées” [“there must never be walls built around it, for all other abbeys are proudly walled.”]²⁴¹ In theory, the abbey is founded on openness to the outside world, but this is soon contrasted with the many details that suggest its selectivity. A few items below, the monk specifies that only “les belles, bien formées, et bien naturées” [“the fair, well-formed and well-natured women”] and comparable males are accepted in the abbey. The abbey is also ageist, as only young, rich, and beautiful people are allowed inside. Chapter LIII, in

²³⁹ Renner, *Difficile est saturam non scribere*, 23.

²⁴⁰ Berrong, *op. cit.*, 38.

²⁴¹ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 138; 116.

which is detailed the “inscription mise sus la grande porte de Theleme” [“Inscription placed over the great gate of Thélème”] goes on to list all the types of people that are not allowed inside: hypocrites, beggars, but also clerks and judges. Very early on, the text suggests the very unsustainability of the abbey it illustrates, sowing paradoxes into its fabric: men and women can go in and out of the abbey as they please, thus defeating the purpose of monastery life. More than a reflection on organized religion and orders, the abbey is then a philosophical exploration of what could happen if perfect young men and women were left to their own devices: “En leur reigle n’estoit que ceste clause. *Fay ce que tu voudras*” [“In their rule was only this clause: DO WHAT YOU WILL.”]²⁴²

It is anticlimactic, in a way, that such a rule, at the end of *Gargantua*, should not result in any chaos or majorly wasteful behaviors. Obviously, the philosophical message here is that, when given liberty of actions, men are more likely to act moderately. However, Thélème is in many ways wasteful, perhaps even more significantly, precisely in this controlled, institutionalized fashion. There are no giants eating or excreting in these chapters, and yet the overwhelming impression is that of consumption, or luxury. This constitutes a much more contemporary commentary on wastefulness in economical terms than the rest of the book probably did. Rebecca Zorach’s main illustration of the nobles being superconsumers in the French Renaissance relies on the castles of the Loire (and Fontainebleau), and this is exactly what Thélème is inspired by: “Ledict bastiment estoit cent foys plus magnificque que n’est Bonivet, ne Chambourg, ne Chantilly” [“The said building was a hundred times more magnificent than is Bonnivet, or Chambord, or Chantilly”].²⁴³ After the description of its principles, chapter LIII turns to depictions of

²⁴² Ibid., 149; 126.

²⁴³ Ibid., 140; 118.

the buildings and finances of the abbey. The resources it needs are no less enormous than the extreme amount of oxens killed before Gargamelle eats too much tripe. Excess is built into the very structure of the abbey.

If anything, Rabelais uses the same device to suggest a similar excess, writing out very long and precise numbers: “Pour le bastiment et assortiment de l’abbaye Gargantua feist livrer de content vingt et sept cent mille huyt cent trente et un mouton à la grand laine, et par chascun an jusques à ce que le tout feust parfaict assigna sus la recepte de la Dive seze cent soixante et neuf mille escuz au soleil et autant à l’estoille poussiniere” [“For the building and furnishing of the abbey, Gargantua had delivered in cash twenty-seven thousand eight hundred and thirty-one long-woolled sheep; and for each year, until the whole thing was completed, he assigned from the receipts of La Dive sixteen hundred and sixty-nine thousand sun-crowns, and as many crowns of the Pleiades.”]²⁴⁴ Here, “mouton à la grand laine” refers to a currency, just like “escuz de soleil.” The funds for Thélème thus come, satirically or not, from exploiting the resources of the land, with the images of sheeps, of a river and of the sun. Immediately contrasted with “bastiment et assortiment,” which refers only to the construction of the abbey and its early years, comes “la fondation et entretenement” [“its founding and maintenance”] the long-term funding, for which Gargantua gives “à perpetuité vingt troys cent soixante neuf mille cinq cens quatorze nobles à la rose de rente fonciere indemnez, amortyz, et solvables par chascun an à la porte de l’abbaye” [“he gave in perpetuity twenty-three hundred and sixty-nine thousand five hundred and fourteen rose nobles and a freehold endowment, exempt from all burdens and services, and payable each year at the abbey gate”]. In a similar play on

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 139; 118.

words, “noble à la rose” is a currency. Yet, on a literal level, the sentence sounds as if nobles were the ones being converted into money: “indemnez, amortyz, et solvables” [literally, exempt, cushioned, and solvent]. Rabelais picks three words that can refer to economic transactions, but also, for the first two at least, to human bodies submitted to a form of violence. Could he be suggesting some sort of precariousness, hidden under the satirical exploitation of the nonhuman names of currencies? This would complicate the calm assurance of Gargantua as the provider for the abbey, whose “entretienement” is guaranteed “à perpetuité.” How sustainable is Thélème, in the long term?

In the description of the architecture and many ornaments of the buildings, Rabelais especially emphasizes the costly materials used for construction, as if to better justify the excessive annuity granted by Gargantua: “De laquelle les marches estoient part de porphyre, part de pierre Numidique, part de marbre serpentín [...]” [“whose steps were in part porphyry, in part Numidian stone, in part serpentine marble”].²⁴⁵ The necessities of luxury thus point in three directions: porphyry is a material that was used in ancient monuments in Rome, from quarries that were mainly situated in Egypt. As a result, the porphyry that is used up to the eighteenth century is directly sourced in Roman monuments that are being destroyed, a gesture that lays those monuments to waste but saves money.²⁴⁶ “Pierre Numidique” refers to modern day Algeria and is a sort of marble, while “marbre serpentín” is a green marble that can be found in many buildings of the Italian Renaissance – likely from quarries in Tuscany. In the whole chapter, these are the only mention of anything remotely difficult to procure, or exotic in some way.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 140; 119.

²⁴⁶ These are the wasted monuments that in part lead Joachim du Bellay to write *Les Antiquités de Rome*. See du Bellay, Joachim, *Les Regrets, suivis des Antiquités de Rome*, Paris: Editions de Cluny, 1948.

This changes significantly in the chapter that follows the “Inscription,” “Comment estoit le manoir des Thelemites” [“How the manor of the Thélémites ran”]. There, the profusion of exotic references is almost too intense to proces, thereby denouncing the significant restraint of the first few chapters. In fact, it is as if Rabelais unleashed his cornucopian style once more with an actual, sculpted cornucopia, perhaps liberated by the first, sober description of “une fontaine magnificque de bel Alabastre” [“a magnificent fountain of fine alabaster”], and the only mention of the lower bodily stratum in the whole episode of Thélème: “Au dessus les troys Graces avecques cornes d’abondance. Et gettoient l’eau par les mamelles, bouche, aureilles, yeulx, et aultres ouvertures du corps” [“above it, the three Graces with cornucopias, and they spouted water from their nipples, mouth, ears, eyes and other openings of the body.”]²⁴⁷ Regardless of how uncharacteristic it is compared to his usual way of referring to genitals, what is suggested is precisely that, after having listed other orifices of the body. A majestic, antique fountain thus dissimulates the only indecent innuendo of the abbey, in a book otherwise filled with them.

Such a cornucopia results in an exotic list of curiosities, clearly meant to evoke the *cabinet de curiosités*: “Au dedans desquelz estoient belles gualeries longues et amples, aornées de pinctures, et cornes de cerfz, licornes, Rhinoceros, Hippopotames, dens de Elephans, et aultres choses spectables” [“within which were fair galleries, long and ample, adorned with paintings and horns of stags, unicorns, rhinoceroses, hippopotamuses, elephants’ tusks, and other sights to see.”] Yet at this point, the geographical references still aim towards the Orient, with animals like rhinoceros and

²⁴⁷ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 144; 123.

elephants, mixed with hunting booty (“cerfz”), and legendary animals (“licornes”). The grounds, outside, exemplify the centrality of leisure and pleasure in Thélème. References abound, from medieval tournaments (“les lices”), to ancient games (*circenses*) and past-times like the “hippodrome,” “theatre” and “natatoires, avecques les bains mirificques” [“and the swimming pools, with the marvelous baths”]. Contrary to the usual, utilitarian purpose of gardens in monasteries, for instance medicinal, Thélème boasts its “beau jardin de plaisance” [“the beautiful pleasure garden”] with a labyrinth in the middle of it. The importance of pleasure and entertainment in Thélème contrasts with what is, at the end of *Gargantua*, established as the ideal of a humanist education, as exemplified in Gargantua’s change of preceptor: no time is every wasted, as is emphasized in the very title of chapter XXIII “Comment Gargantua feut institué par Ponocrates en telle discipline, qu’il ne perdoit heure du jour.” After such a utilitarian conception of a typical day, Thélème seems incredibly wasteful in time, money, ornaments, and value.

Arguably, the particularly exotic conception of luxury in Thélème makes it even more difficult to sustain, since it keeps refering to other distant lands and their products. Gilbert Chinard already suggested as a potential reading what seems now an undeniable one: “Je ne sais même si l’on ne pourrait point reconnaître dans la description de Thélème quelques traces d’un exotisme oriental ou américain, dont les éléments auraient été fournis par les *Oceani Decades*.” [I am not entirely sure whether we could not recognize in the description of Thélème some traces of an oriental exoticism, or an American one, the elements of which would have been provided by the *Decades*.]²⁴⁸ At the end of the fifty-fifth chapter, Rabelais lists more oriental products of consumption: “Iceulx

²⁴⁸ Chinard, *op. cit.*, 54

fournissoient par chascun matin les chambres des dames, d'eau rose, d'eau de naphe, et d'eau d'ange, et à chascune la precieuse cassollette vaporante de toutes drogues aromatiques" ["Each morning these furnished the ladies' chambers with rose water, orange-flower water, and myrtle water, and each lady with a precious casket breathing forth every kind of aromatic drugs."]²⁴⁹ Immediately after, the clothes described are incredibly varied, depicting an accurate portrait of trends in French Renaissance fashion, with lists of different cloths, more or less rare, more or less exotic, "à la Moresque" ["some Moorish style"] or with "de petites perles Indiques" ["with little Indian pearls"]. Towards the end of that chapter, Rabelais describes the village of craftsmen and merchants that has been built, out of necessity, in the outskirts of the abbey, "au tour du boys de Thélème" ["around the Thélème wood"]. Once more, he describes the buildings first, and then moves on to speak of resources: "Iceulx estoient fourniz de matiere et estoffe par les mains du seigneur Nausiclete, lequel par chascun an leurs rendoit sept navires des Isles de Perlas et Canibales, chargées de lingotz d'or, de soye crue, de perles et pierreries" ["These [craftsmen] were furnished with material and cloth by the hands of Lord Nausiclete, who for each year brought them seven shiploads from the islands of Perlas and the Cannibals, laden with gold ingots, raw silk, pearls, and precious stones."]²⁵⁰ This is, to my knowledge, the only mention of the New World in Rabelais's *Gargantua*, and, significantly enough, it is in one of the few moments in which Rabelais feels the need to discuss finances and resources, after having depicted the characteristic abundance of

²⁴⁹ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 145; 124.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 148; 125-6. Note that the earlier "perles indiques" linguistically announced the later "isles de Perlas."

Renaissance nobility. In a way, it is Thélème that creates the need for colonial endeavors in the New World.

Whether the tone is satirical or not at that particular moment does not matter; in the midst of a careful, organized satire of wastefulness, Rabelais places the location of seemingly endless resources in the newly discovered islands of the Caribbean. The point of reference still seems blurry and undefined enough that Rabelais does not appear to know too much about it: indeed, there never was any raw silk to be produced in the New World. The wastefulness is even pushed to absurdity in the last sentence, where the reader learns that, were some of these pearls to lose their shine (“si quelques unions tendoient à vetusté, et changeoient de naïfve blancheur [...]” [if a few union pearls were getting too old and losing their natural whiteness]), they were given to eat to “quelques beaulx cocqs” [“a few handsome roosters”]. From whole villages being fed tripe at Gargantua’s birth, to some select chickens being fed pearls, the book has come a long way in the realm of wastefulness. The *dépense excessive* has become less joyful, and more revolting, even under the disguise of satire.

Once the *Tiers Livre* begins, past the prologue – which will be considered below together with the others – the story goes on as if *Gargantua* (the prequel) had never happened in between, a continuation of Pantagruel’s adventures in Dipsodie. In *Pantagruel*, upon learning that his father Gargantua needs him to fight in Dipsodie, the situation is explained thus: “les Dipsodes estoient yssus de leurs limites, et avoyent gasté un grand pays de Utopie [...]” [“the Dipsodes had burst out of their boundaries and laid waste to a large area of Utopia”].²⁵¹ Another form of Rabelaisian waste is thus,

²⁵¹ Ibid., 298; 209.

undoubtedly, the conquest of lands. Later on, Pantagruel's strategy precisely involves his own conquest of Dipsodie through the process of colonization: "Non pas qu'il me faille gens davantaige pour me ayder à le conquerer: [...] Doncques je les meneray comme une colonie en Dipsodie, et leur donneray tout le pays, qui est beau, salubre, fructueux, et plaisant sus tous les pays du monde [...]" ["Not that I need more men to help me conquer it, [...]. So I'll take them as a colony into Dipsody, and give them the whole country, which is beautiful, healthy, and fruitful and pleasant above all the countries in the world"].²⁵² Therefore, not only does Rabelais give a significant place to the New World in his narrative, geographically: he also discloses an interest for conquest and colonies. In the middle of the sixteenth-century, it is hardly surprising, and yet the scholarship has so far failed to notice and draw the potential and necessary conclusions, especially in a narrative that constantly challenges the perception of abundance and excess. Rabelais creates in these episodes an odd oscillation between colonized and colonizer, and underscores at the same time the interdependence between two worlds (the colony and the kingdom of France), and between body and environment.

Out of the beginning of the *Tiers Livre*, scholars have usually paid close attention to Panurge's paradoxical praise of debt (in chapters three and four), immediately followed by its condemnation in chapter five by Pantagruel.²⁵³ More overlooked is the fact that such a discussion directly follows a description of one case of colonization. Pantagruel brings a colony of Utopians to Dipsodie: "pour ledict pays rafraichir, peupler, et orner, mal autrement habité, et desert en grande partie" ["so as to refresh, populate and

²⁵² Ibid., 328; 236.

²⁵³ See M. Fontaine, "Rabelais et Speroni," in *Etudes rabelaisiennes*, XVII, 1983, p. 1-8 for a study of the relationship between the satirical eulogy of debt and Speroni's two dialogues.

adorn the said country, which was otherwise ill inhabited and for the most part a wilderness”].²⁵⁴ Mireille Huchon specifies, in a footnote, that this is the first occurrence, in French, of “colony” in the sense of a group of immigrants. Before then, it merely referred to the space itself, not to the inhabitants of that space.²⁵⁵ After a satirical pause on the fertility of Utopians, the narrator addresses the readers and exposes his conception of a good conquest, starting with what should be avoided:

Noterez doncques icy Beuveurs, que la maniere d’entretenir et retenir pays nouvellement conquestez, n’est (comme a esté l’opinion erronée de certains espritz tyranniques à leur dam et deshonneur) les peuples pillant, forçant, angariant, ruinant, mal vexant, et regissant avecques verges de fer.
[So you will note here, toppers, that the way to maintain and retain newly acquired countries is not (as certain tyrannical spirits have opined, to their hurt and dishonor) by plundering, forcing, harassing, ruining the peoples, and ruling them with iron rods]²⁵⁶

The words for conquest are carefully chosen, “entretenir” recalling Thélème, and “retenir” involving some notion of perpetuity. The first image is, precisely, a personification: “Comme enfant nouvellement né, les fault alaicter, berser, esjouir” [“Like a newborn child we must nurse them, cradle them, fondle them.”] The comparison implies a maternal positioning for the conquering power, and a certain softness in execution. The verbs listed in the infinitive, however, do not seem to refer to any particular practical advice on how to rule a recently conquered land; this is about attitude and atmosphere rather than politics. Rabelais continues with a nonhuman comparison: “Comme arbre nouvellement plantée, les fault appuyer, asceurer, defendre de toute vimeres, injures, et calamitez” [“Like a newly planted tree we must support them, secure

²⁵⁴ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 353; 261.

²⁵⁵ See Rabelais, 1371, for footnote. The CNRTL gives a first occurrence of *colonie* in French as, in 1308, “territoire administré par un gouvernement ou un prince d’un pays étranger.”

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 354-5 ; 261-2.

them, defend them against all storms, damages and calamities.”] The tree already provides a more efficient comparison, and the verbs listed, this time, can all apply more practically to the compared object. Note also that, at this point, “les” is the only reference Rabelais gives of the subject, which could refer to either the “pays nouvellement conquetez” above, therefore, to lands, or to “les peuples,” although the latter is only in the function of object in the first sentence of the present paragraph. Rabelais completes his exposition with a third comparison: “Comme personne saulvé de longue et forte maladie, et venent à convalescence, les fault choyer, espargner, restaurer” [“Like a person, saved from a long potent illness and coming to convalescence, we must coddle them, spare them, restore them.”] Note that the word *espargner* – one opposite of the verb ‘to waste’ – is precisely central to Panurge’s paradoxical praise of debt in the first chapters of the *Tiers Livre*. A moderating movement is therefore already visible in the context of a discussion of colonization.

In each of these analogies, Rabelais develops the same construction of a comparison, introducing the comparative and a significant detail about it with a past participle (“nouvellement né”, “saulvé de longue et forte maladie”), followed by the injunction “les fault,” and a series of three verbs in the infinitive. The land colonized is always depicted with a certain sense of fragility, compared to a newborn, a sapling, a recently-ill person. While the two first injunctions sound like the land is merely made new and young again by its recent conquest by another power, the third one clarifies the process: under the previous power, it was a “longue et forte maladie,” implying that a conquest by a more powerful people immediately downgrades the strength and quality of the politics in that land. There is also, in Rabelais’s depiction, the underlying impression

of danger and precarity; the first injunction appeared delicate and quite positive, the second immediately shifts that impression with the added ternary of “vimeres, injures, et calamitez.” This seems to imply, in a great paradox, that the conquest was not already in itself – given the violence, ruin and devastation implied by the noun – such a *calamitez*, if the land needs such a dedicated amount of care. Rabelais goes on to list several anecdotes from antiquity: Osiris, Evergetes, Alexandre Macedon. In fact, such injunctions recall almost exactly Montaigne’s later lamentation that the New World discovery did not happen under Alexander the Great, who would have softened the conquest (my emphasis):

Que n’est tombée sous Alexandre, ou sous ces anciens Grecs et Romains, une si noble conquête : et une si grande mutation et alteration de tant d’empires et de peuples, sous des mains, qui eussent *doucement* polir et défricher ce qu’il y avoit de sauvage : et eussent *conforté et promu* les bonnes semences, que nature y avoit produit : meslant non seulement à la culture des terres, et ornement des villes, les arts de deçà, en tant qu’elles y eussent esté nécessaires, mais aussi, meslant les vertus Grecques et Romaines, aux origineles du pays?²⁵⁷

[Why did not such a noble conquest fall to Alexander or to those ancient Greek and Romans? Why did not such a great change and alteration of so many empires and peoples fall into hands that would have gently polished and cleared away whatever was barbarous in them, and would have strengthened and fostered the good seeds that nature had produced in them, not only adding to the cultivation of the earth and the adornment of cities the arts of our side of the ocean, in so far as they would have been necessary, but also adding the Greek and Roman virtues to those originally in that region?]

Rabelais, with his present exposition, announced Montaigne’s position decades later. His is an attempt to make sense of conquests, to manage them properly—hence, the verb “espargner,” a synonym of, precisely, “ménager.” When talking of colonizing, Rabelais seems to call for moderation already – before the often studied prologue to the *Quart Livre*. In fact, after these anecdotes, a chiasmus exposes the best way to manage a new

²⁵⁷ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 910; 843-4.

land, appealing again to the notion of resources: “suppliant à ce qui deffailloit: ce que abondoit avalluant” [“supplying what was lacking, pricing down what was plentiful.”]²⁵⁸

Panurge’s Alternative Management: “Aultrement mesnagier”

It is in this context, and directly following such an apology of moderation in the managing of lands, that one must read the second chapter of the *Tiers Livre*, in the form of a satirical eulogy (*éloge paradoxal*) of spending. Panurge is assigned “chastellain de Salmiguondin” [“lord of Salmagundi”] in the same way that Sancho Panza is named governor of Baratania in *Don Quixote*, for satirical purpose only.²⁵⁹ The funding behind Salmiguondin is presented in ways similar to those already observed in Thélème: the reader is told what the domain is worth every year, again with the currency of “moutons à la grand laine.” Yet this time, the annual income is divided in “deniers certains” [“certain cash”] and “incertain revenu” [uncertain revenue] implying an uncertainty that was not present in the perpetual income of Thélème.²⁶⁰ Furthermore, Rabelais adds “montant bon an mal an” [“year in year out amounted to”] emphasizing this duality.²⁶¹ Immediately, Panurge fails: “Et se gouverna si bien et prudemment monsieur le nouveau chastellain, qu’en moins de quatorze jours il dilapida le revenu certain et incertain de sa Chastellenie pour troys ans” [“And so well and prudently did Milord the new Lord of the Manor

²⁵⁸ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 355; 262. Once more, the familiar with Derrida speaks for itself.

²⁵⁹ As Bernd Renner puts it in “From *Satura* to *Satyre*: François Rabelais and the Renaissance Appropriation of a Genre,” (*Renaissance Quarterly*, 67 (2014): 377-424) “The post had initially been attributed to the now-absent narrator and putative author of the first two books, Alcofribas Nasier, and denoted his responsibility for the eclectic yet farcical mixture that characterizes the first two installments of the chronicles. Now Panurge is in charge of this low-norm culinary mixture – *salmigondis* literally denotes a hodgepodge or ragout – but his first action as his new warden, the praise of debts, fails, for the first time, to convince Pantagruel” (405).

²⁶⁰ In his translation, Frame misses the parallel between both phrases, and even translates, wrongly, “l’incertain revenu” as “the certain revenue,” its contrary. Rabelais 357; 264.

²⁶¹ Also, “bon an mal an” implies a good or bad harvest, due to good or bad weather conditions.

govern himself that in less than a fortnight he had squandered the revenue, certain and uncertain, of his castleship for three years.”] *Dilapider* is used here quite clearly in a derogatory way: *gaspillage* is possible, even in Terence Cave’s idea of a cornucopian text. Besides, Rabelais distinguishes a purely gratuitous squandering from what he calls a proper one: “Non proprement dilapida, comme vous pourriez dire en fondations de monasteres, erections de temples, bastimens de collieges et hospitaux, ou jectant son lard aux chiens” [“He did not really squander it, as you might say, on founding monasteries, erecting churches, building schools and hospitals, or tossing his bacon to the dogs”].

The distinction is made between utilitarian spending and another sort of spending, with “proprement dilapida.”²⁶² One would be excusable, the other not: “Mais despendit en mille petitz banquetz et festins joyeux, ouvers à tous venens, mesmement tous bons compaignons, jeunes fillettes, et mignonnes gualoises” [“but he spent it on myriad joyous little banquets and feasts open to all comers, especially good companions, young girls, and cute wenches”]. This is problematic because it is precisely those banquets and feasts that characterize the Rabelaisian text up to then. In a minute, the narrator seems aware of the squandering that is involved by the attitudes of Gargantua and Pantagruel. Yet Panurge’s behavior is even more wasteful, and does not limit itself to the mere consumption of food in excess: “Abastant boys, bruslant les grosses souches pour la vente des cendres, prenent argent d’avance, achaptant cher, vendent à bon marché, et mangeant son bled en herbe” [“felling woods, burning the big logs to sell the ashes, taking money in advance, buying dear, selling cheap, and eating his wheat in the blade.”] In such a description, it is difficult not to consider Panurge an early modern depiction of a

²⁶² This movement is also visible in Montaigne’s “Des coches”: see chapter IV.

capitalist, burning up resources and speculating poorly. On the opposite, placid Pantagruel is a vision in ascetism and moderation: “Car tous les biens que le Ciel couvre: et que la Terre contient en toutes ses dimensions: haulteur, profondeur, longitudee, et latitude, ne sont dignes d’esjouir nos affections, et troubler nos sens et espritz” [“for all the goods that Heaven covers and earth holds in all its dimensions – height, depth, length, and width – do not deserve to stir our affections or trouble our senses and spirits.”] This will be expanded upon later on, in the prologue to the *Quart Livre*, as an essential component of the philosophy of pantagruelism.

Depicted as, therefore, quite detached from material possessions, Pantagruel actually reveals himself to be very much concerned with them, immediately after: “Seulement tira Panurge à part, et doulcettelement luy remonstra, que si ainsi vouloit vivre, et n’estre aultrement mesnagier : impossible seroit, ou pour le moins bien difficile, le faire jamais riche” [“Only he drew Panurge aside and gently pointed out to him that if he would live that way and not husband his resources differently, impossible it would be, or at least very difficult, to make him rich.”]²⁶³ The real character who is detached from material possessions is therefore, surprisingly, Panurge, who declares that he does not care about becoming rich at all. He is frustrated at the concerns for reasonable spending, which he calls “mesnaige.” It refers to something like a domestic economy, and later became the verb “to manage” – which Donald Frame translates as “to husband.” The verb *mesnager* incorporates the neutral administration of a domain or house, and, by extension, the more moderate notion of frugality, found first in La Boétie in 1570 and later in Olivier de Serres’s *Théâtre d’agriculture et mesnage des champs*. It is important,

²⁶³ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 358; 265.

however, that Panurge seems to be floating between both notions, or at least, to take advantage of this ambivalence for his satirical eulogy: “Tout le monde crie “mesnaige, mesnaige. Mais tel parle de mesnaige, qui ne sçayt mie que c’est” [“Everyone cries: “Thrift, thrift!’ but a man or two talks about thrift who knows not what it is.”] He proceeds to give reasonable causes for his actions. One of them is the vanity of being rich for long, when one cannot be sure of the longevity of the world: “Qui sçayt si le monde durera encores troys ans? Et ores qu’il durast d’adventaige, est il home tant fol qui se ausast promettre vivre troys ans?” [“Who knows if the world will last another three years? And even if it should last longer, is there any man so insane as to dare promise himself to live three years?”] A key element of Panurge’s argumentation is the temporality and endurance of the domain: the next example is taken from Cato who, in his own “mesnagerie,” claimed that “Il fault [...] que le perefamilles soit vendeur perpetuel” [“The paterfamilias, he says, must be a perpetual seller.”]²⁶⁴ Perpetuity, just like in Thélème, is thus shown to be a problematic notion, surrounded by ideas of uncertainty and squandering in this chapter. Even more, the chapter is filled with images of storage and hoarding, for instance: “Par ce moyen est impossible qu’en fin riche ne devieigne, si tousjours dure l’apothecque” [“By this method it is impossible for him not to become rich at last, if his provisions hold out.”] From the Greek ἀποθήκη, meaning a repository or a storehouse, the word is used here to talk of stocking up, at the extreme opposite of the *dépense* that Panurge eulogizes in the chapter. The attack is directed at economy and frugality, from the standpoint of squandering and *dépense*.

²⁶⁴ Rabelais probably refers to Cato the Elder’s *De re rustica*, a miscellaneous collection of rules of husbandry and management.

Furthermore, Panurge's strategy is to turn the meaning of the words of frugality upside down. His interpretation of "De Temperance," upon giving a new meaning to the idiomatic expression, "mangeant mon bled en herbe" is therefore, instead of an explanation of moderation, a complete refusal of a whole economical system that relies on wheat and its production: everyone who works in the field of wheat thus finds themselves spared (*épargnés*) by the fact that Panurge has already eaten his wheat when it was but sprouts. Panurge thus plays on the meaning of *épargner*: "et ainsi espargnant pour les estropiatz et souffreteux. Car ce faisant, j'espargne les sercleurs qui guaingnent argent [...]" ["and thus saving up for the cripples and the afflicted. For by so doing I save on the weeders, who make money"]²⁶⁵ The first "espargnant", coupled with the preposition "pour", signifies to save for these people. Immediately after, the second "j'espargne", transitive, means "to spare", and, in this context, it is because since wheat has been eaten by Panurge when it was sprouting, the series of occupations that are derived from it find themselves without work: "sercleurs," "mestiviers", "basteurs", "meusniers," [the weeders, reapers, threshers, millers] but also "gleneurs," the gleaners. Panurge thus seems to refuse the very process of the market economy, in this case of the cultivation of wheat. It is as if there was an accusation implied in Pantagruel's exhortation to be "aultrement mesnagier" or *épargnant*, that is not merely subsumed in one's management of their income. By eating his wheat in sprouts, Panurge compares himself to "un Hermite, vivent de sallades et racines: me emancipant des appetitz sensuelz" ["living on salads and roots like a hermit, emancipating myself from sensory appetites"]. To not be economical means to be sensual. What the satirical praise comes to,

²⁶⁵ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 359; 266.

in the end, sounds like an alternative to the general, early capitalist economy. Alternative like the modern *alter-mondialistes* are: this is Panurge's way of being "aultrement mesnagier." For Panurge, the last word of this chapter is that it is a skill to "beaucoup en brief temps despendre" ["spend so much in a short time"]²⁶⁶ Whether this skill is valuable or useful has little to do with the discussion. It is then significant that the last sentence of the chapter sounds like it could be taken out of Georges Bataille's *La notion de dépense* or *La part maudite*, because of the emphasis put on *consumation* and the sacrificial dimension of expenditure:²⁶⁷ "Je le peuz vous justement dire, comme le dist Caton de Albidius, lequel avoir en excessive despense mangé tout ce qu'il possedoit, restant seulement une maison, y mist le feu dedans, pour dire, *consummatum est*, ainsi que depuys dist saint Thomas Dacquin, quand il eut la Lamproye toute mangée. Cela non force" ["I can justly say of you what Cato said of Alcibiidius, who, after eating up all he possessed by excessive expenditure, since all that was left was one house, he set fire to it, so as to say *consummatum est*, even as later Saint Thomas Aquinas sad when he had eaten up the whole lamprey. Let it pass."] ²⁶⁸

Usually, the chapter is read as Rabelais's denunciation of "debteurs et emprunteurs" ["debtors and creditors"], since scholars assume Pantagruel to be the voice of reason in the *Tiers Livre*, while Panurge is but a fool. I would like to take a more philosophical approach to these chapters, and suggest at the same time that there is just as

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 360; 267.

²⁶⁷ See Introduction, for details on Georges Bataille's work and his theory of expenditure. Also, see chapter IV for a closer analysis of the relationship between Montaigne's vision of excess and Bataille's.

²⁶⁸ In *La Part maudite*, Georges Bataille uses "consumation" precisely as a synonym of "dépense." For details, see his "Avant-propos," p.41, in *La Part maudite; La Notion de dépense*, Paris: Minuit, 1967.

much, in the text, to sustain a true praise of debt, or rather, that readers should not dismiss Panurge's opinions upon the pretext that he is Pantagruel's fool. Arguably, there is an underlying coherence in these first chapters for a new care for such questions as how much to spend, how much to save, for how long, and the usefulness of such questions as well.²⁶⁹ More than that, it is the question of man's behavior towards the resources that matters. Ultimately, below the *mesnagerie* lies the etymology of ecology, from the Greek *οἶκος* (house, dwelling place, estate) and *λογία* (the study of). Panurge is merely referring to Salmiguondin, his own estate, and yet chapters III and IV are greatly influenced by neoplatonism (that of Italian Marsilio Ficino in particular) and alchemy, displaying a much wider scope. In chapter III, Panurge imagines a world where neither debt nor borrowing is allowed. He speaks of the correlation and interdependence among all elements, human and nonhuman, so many other forms of debt. For instance, it is the earth that would lend, and man who would borrow: "Car la terre desistoit leurs prester nourrissement par vapeurs et exhalations [...]" ["for the earth was desisting from lending them nourishment by vapors and exhalations"].²⁷⁰ It is, once more, Aesop's fable of the Belly and the Members, also parodied in the Gaster episode in the *Quart Livre*, that seems to dictate Rabelais's conception of the interdependence of all bodies: "en ce monde desrayé" ["in this disrupted world"], if borrowing were not possible among bodies, "vous voirez une conspiration plus pernicieuse, que n'a figuré Aesope en son Apologue" ["you will see an even more pernicious conspiracy than Aesop represented in his fable."]²⁷¹ The

²⁶⁹ As Mireille Huchon specifies, discussions on the topic of debts were topical at the time. See, for details, L. Sainéan, "Sources modernes de Rabelais," *Revue des études rabelaisiennes*, X, 1912 ; and M. Fontaine, "Rabelais et Speroni," *Etudes rabelaisiennes*, XVII, 1983, p. 1-8.

²⁷⁰ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 363; 269.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 364; 270

human and nonhuman are two separate but correlated worlds, different only in size: “Et si au patron de ce fascheux et chagrin monde rien ne prestant, vous figurez l’autre petit monde, qui est l’home, vous y trouverez un terrible tintamarre” [“And if on the model of this loathsome peevish world lending nothing you imagine the other, little world, which is man, in him you’ll find a terrible jinglejangle.”] In such a representation, the chaotic “tintamarre” contrasts mightily with the *alternative* of the other world in chapter IV: “Au contraire, representez vous un monde autre, on quel un chascun preste, un chascun doive, tous soient debtors, tous soient presteurs. O quelle harmonie sera parmy les reguliers mouvemens des Cieulz” [“On the contrary, imagine a different world in which everyone lends, everyone owes, all are debtors, all are lenders.”]²⁷²

Bernd Renner interprets these chapters thus: “Panurge has thus retained his entertainment value and his talent for farcical performance, but has lost his power to convince.”²⁷³ Such a conclusion is only valid if one, precisely, takes too seriously the dialogue between Pantagruel and Panurge. The real question, instead, is to know which of the two characters best represent the spirit of pantagruelism, or if, even more, Rabelais does not imply that both positions and attitudes have their own advantages and drawbacks: in such a *cas de figure*, Pantagruel would compensate for Panurge’s excess, which does not mean that the former is right and the latter wrong. For the exact same reason, the prologue to the *Tiers-Livre* and that of the *Quart Livre* are difficult to subsume in a coherent way with the other two. I would argue that the prologue of the *Tiers-Livre*, with the Cynic Diogenes as its main character, is a manifesto in Panurge-ism, while the prologue to the *Quart Livre* is, instead, what is supposed to be the leftover, the

²⁷² Ibid., 364; 271.

²⁷³ Renner, *RQ*, 406.

quintessence of pantagruelism, at the other extremity of the chronicles. How can we reconcile, then, the call for moderation of the *Quart Livre* and the strange, agitated behavior of Diogenes in the *Tiers Livre*? In the latter, the main episode features Diogenes, in the margins of the preparations for war in Corinth, rolling his barrel up and down the hill. Rabelais proceeds to compare himself to Diogenes, assessing the apparent public inutility of his work as an author, but brandishing his “tonneau inexpuisible” as an inevitable, unstoppable force. In the former, the main event is the fable of Couillatris – borrowed and adapted from Aesop’s “The Honest Woodcutter,” a humble woodcutter who loses his axe is tested by the messenger of the Gods, Hermes; he is given a choice between a golden axe, a silver axe, and his own simple axe. Couillatris picks his own, and is gifted, as a reward for his honesty and modesty, the other two. Others try to imitate Couillatris and are punished for their greed. Rabelais concludes that we should not have excessive wishes and writes: “Soubaitiez doncques mediocrité, elle vous adviendra, et encore mieulx, deument ce pendent labourans et travaillans.” [“So wish for a moderate lot: it will come to you, and all the better, meanwhile toiling and working”].²⁷⁴ A comparative scrutiny of both prologues could function as a conclusion for the present chapter.

As far as prologues go in the Rabelaisian *corpus*, the tranquillity of the *Quart Livre* diverges significantly from the commotion of Diogenes in the *Tiers Livre*. It would be foolish to assume that, merely because the prologue of the *Quart Livre* is the ultimate one, it bears the highest strength and meaning overall, and to leave it at that. If waste is a

²⁷⁴ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 534; 435.

constant in all of the Chronicles, what lesson are we to retain at the end? By the time the reader reaches both of these prologues, waste represents much more than a mere positive abundance, or derogatory excess. It is also, and most of all, the seemingly gratuitous locomotion of Diogenes on the margins of Corinth's preparations for war in the *Tiers Livre's* prologue. And it is also, simultaneously, I argue, the moderate aspirations of Couillatrix and the ideal of *mediocritas* exposed in that of the *Quart Livre*. Gratuitous motion is a frequent constant of the Rabelaisian text, from the uninterrupted "esmouchetage" of the Lion and the Fox in the walls of Paris episode, to young Gargantua covering his surroundings with excrement, to the never-ending list of verbs synonyms of "tourner" as Diogenes moves his barrel up and down the hill *ad infinitum*. The latter's motion is connoted as environmental, in an explanation that resonates in many ways with the definition of waste:

Ce voyant quelq'un de ses amis, luy demanda, quelle cause le mouvoit, à son corps, son esprit, son tonneau ainsi tormenter? Auquel respondit le philosophe, qu'à aultre office n'estant pour la republicque employé, il en ceste façon son tonneau tempestoit, pour entre ce peuple tant fervent et occupé, n'estre veu seul cessateur et ocieux.

[Seeing this, one of his friends asked him what cause impelled him thus to torment his body, his spirit, his barrel. To which the philosopher replied that being employed on no other business by the commonwealth, he harried his barrel this way amid this people so fervent and occupied, not alone to seem a slacker and an idler.]²⁷⁵

The quotation functions as a perfect amalgamation of concepts for the present chapter: "tormenter" and "tempestoit," supplementary synonyms for "tourner," to refer to how Diogenes moves his barrel, take a detour through bad weather and environmental hazards, and through the figurative meaning of such verbs for a troubled soul and mind, showing once again the intercorporeality of nonhuman objects and human bodies – "son

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 348; 256.

corps, son esprit, son tonneau.” “Aultre office” displays another alternative, this time, to occupation and labor, an excellent example of what an alternative is: that is to say, neither the opposite of the term – which in this case would be mere inactivity or immobility – nor the term itself, but another way to approach it. Rabelais, despite the apparent eulogy of leisure and pleasure all through the *Chronicles* – in particular in Thélème, for instance – cannot and does not wish to be subsumed under the terms “cessateur et ocieux,” so that what he calls for is necessary different. A mere gratuitous movement, waste for the sake of wasting, in the margins of the system, the “republicque.”

One could think, like Bernd Renner, that such an ambivalence is a symptom of Rabelais’s version of the Menippean paradox, meant to “démontrer justement l’arbitraire des signes, leur manque de fiabilité dans un tel cas et la futilité de l’entreprise tout court.” [to demonstrate precisely the arbitrary dimension of signs, their lack of reliability in such a case, and the futility of the whole enterprise.]²⁷⁶ Or, like Gérard Genette, one could see the prologue of the *Tiers Livre* as laying “l’utilité paradoxale de l’oeuvre inutile.” [the paradoxical utility of the useless work].²⁷⁷ That such questions as utility and futility ultimately come to the forefront in those two prologues is not incidental, if one grants to the notion of waste its due importance in interpreting the Rabelaisian text. Yet, if Renner reads the prologue of the *Tiers Livre* as a presentation of both extremes in order to be able to reach the “juste milieu” of the *Quart Livre*’s *mediocritas*, it does not begin to explicate the “tonneau inexpuisible,” [inexhaustible barrel], one of the most lingering images of the Rabelaisian *corpus*. This perpetual flow, that of the money funding Thélème, that of the

²⁷⁶ Renner, Bernd, “Ni l’un ni l’autre et tous les deux à la fois”: le paradoxe ménippéen inversé dans le *Tiers Livre* de Rabelais,” *Romanic Review*, Mar 2006; 97, p. 159.

²⁷⁷ Genette, Gérard, *Seuils*, Paris: Seuil, 1987, 158, cited by Renner in op. cit.

“tonneau Diogenic,” implies an infinite amount of resources: “Il a source vive, et vene perpetuelle.” [“It has a living spring and a perpetual vein.”]²⁷⁸ The prologue is thus haunted by images of infinity and perpetual movement, and yet they connote Hell and permanent punishment in the after-life, with the figures of Sisyphus and of the Danaïds. In the face of such futility, Rabelais seems to ask, should he despair or rejoice? Should he be “cessateur” or active anyway?

With Bakhtin, we read Rabelais as staging man’s encounter with the world, to man’s advantage, or at the world’s expense. The texts reveal the fallacy of reliability among bodies, the interrupted continuity that puts man at the center and above all, free to decide on their needs, and to choose the ways to procure such goods. In that way, the perception of waste does logically follow the progressive focus on the colonial endeavors in the New World, which themselves are motivated by an early modern consumerism. In turn, Rabelais represents, on multiple occasions, the necessary balance and moderation in human endeavors in general: by emphasizing the need for a reasonable expenditure, for a reasoned managing of the resources, with Panurge in *Salmiguondin*. Rabelais denounces the extreme utilitarianism that would block the flow of economics – with Panurge’s praise of debt – and establishes the ambivalence of luxury and exoticism – with Thélème.

Yet what does Rabelais imply with the insistence on Diogenes’s movement? The answer to the question could lie in *Gargantua*’s prologue. In the “boyte” described, containing many wonderful things (including “entendement plus que humain, vertus merveilleuse, courage invincible [...]”), one can also find “deprisement incroyable de tout ce pourquoy les humains tant veiglent, courent, travaillent, naviguent et bataillent”

²⁷⁸ Rabelais, *op. cit.*, 351; 259.

[“incredible disesteem for everything on account of which humans lie awake, run, labor, sail, and fight.”]²⁷⁹ The gradation in motion of these verbs is despised, from merely staying awake to laboring, navigating and fighting. In the *Tiers Livre*’s prologue, Rabelais offers a futile alternative. In the context of *Chronicles* that contain so many navigations, other lands, discourses of conquest and *dépense* and references to the New World, it would be difficult not to read the “naviguent et bataillent” as a condemnation of greed and cruelty, which are not to be confused with mere appetite and curiosity. If all this movement strives for more, for a surplus, for accumulating more wealth – dimensions of wastefulness – Rabelais declares that it is to be despised, and vain. There is a redeeming quality to the non-*mediocritas*, something to do with pleasure and sensuality. Rabelais is therefore perhaps the first, in the French Renaissance, to see how little fun being economical can be, while at the same time advocating for *mediocritas*. A few decades later, Montaigne will face the same ambivalence.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 6; 3.

INTERVAL

“Une Agitation extraordinaire” and the Vain Movement of Colonization:
Waste and Consumption in the New World in Montaigne’s “Des Cannibales” and “Des
coches”

Many scholars have noted the undeniable coherence between “Des Cannibales”, (I: 31) and “Des coches”, despite their being distanced in the spatial distribution of the *Essais* and in the chronology of Montaigne’s writing process. Indeed, “Des Cannibales” was written before 1580, since it is published in the first two books of the *Essais*, in Bordeaux. Montaigne only writes the third and final book in 1587, before publishing the three-book edition in 1588 in Paris.²⁸⁰ Written a decade apart, the two chapters directly addressing the New World resonate in more ways than their mere common topic, namely, the indigenous peoples of the New World and the way they are perceived, and the colonization of this land by European powers and its consequences. Frank Lestringant talks of the possibility to distinguish a genealogy between both essays, “celle qui fait de l’Amérique des “coches” la fille du Brésil des “Cannibales.”²⁸¹ Beyond the anthropological, humanist dimension, the “cultural relativism” (Duval), and the obvious critique of colonization, both essays reveal an environmental thought that relates all of these topics, and exceeds them. While the postcolonial turn brought focus on issues of

²⁸⁰ Montaigne, Michel de, *Les Essais, édition Villey-Saulnier*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004. The English translation will always come from *The Complete Works*, translated by Donald M. Frame, Everyman’s Library, Stanford: Stanford University Press and New York : Random House, 2003, 847.

The Pléiade 2007 edition specifies that a great part of Livre I was written in the years 1572-1573, in the detailed “Chronologie.” For previous canonical works on the relationship between the two essays, see Edwin Duval, “Lesson of the New World: Design and Meaning in Montaigne’s “Des Cannibales” (I:31) and “Des coches” (III:6)”, *Yale French Studies*, No 64, 1983, pp. 95-112.

²⁸¹ Lestringant, Frank, *Le Brésil de Montaigne: Le Nouveau-Monde des Essais (1580-1592)*, Paris : Chandeigne, 2005, 62.

alterity, transcultural encounters and violence, I argue that these themes, as they are presented in Montaigne's *Essais*, cannot and must not be read without ecology.

Reading the texts for traces of an environmental thought, one excavates the thread of change, or, more precisely, a focus on the moveable elements of the natural world. The great change of the discovery of the New World manifests itself in the *Essais* as a perception of globality, taking over the more local interpretations of the environment. Such a change is focalized on the spatial notion of waste: it is not the local wasteland of medieval literature, as visible in the reading of Eleanor Johnson in "The Poetics of Waste: Medieval English Ecocriticism," but rather a more global sense of waste, represented by images of overflow and of corruption.²⁸² One would assume that the Old World would be represented as wasteful, while the New World would be a stockpile of resources and abundance; the reality of the texts differs.

It is, in fact, in the "first musings over fabled Atlantis or the golden age of old" that scholars pain to make sense of, in a chapter, "Des Cannibales," that only reaches its actual object towards the last page (Hoffmann), that I see the foundation of Montaigne's environmental thought.²⁸³ The discussions of the beginning of that chapter are indeed not random musings on mutability, but should instead be seen as intimately linked to the thematics of New World discovery and its consequences. Though previously overlooked, the environment is structurally significant to Montaigne's argument, as the recent work of

²⁸² Johnson, Eleanor, "The Poetics of Waste: Medieval English Ecocriticism," *PMLA*, vol. 127, number 3, May 2012, pp. 460–476.

²⁸³ Hoffmann, George, "Anatomy of the Mass: Montaigne's "Cannibals""", *PMLA*, vol. 117, No 2, March 2002, pp. 207-221.

Tom Conley demonstrates.²⁸⁴ For instance, Conley argues, in his article ““Des Cannibales”: essai *sous* le don,” that there is a compensating force at work in the essay, having to do with the simultaneous ruin of the New World and of the Wars of Religion in France: “L’hypothèse est, writes Conley, que le chapitre est un essai-don que tend l’auteur dans l’espoir de faire réparer la ruine et dévastation du nouveau monde dont il est témoin pendant les Guerres de Religion.” Even more than a merely economic and anthropological principle of exchange, such a hypothesis reveals the intrinsic relationship between economics and environmental concerns in the case of such ruin. Indeed, from “Des Cannibales” onward, I would argue that Montaigne’s writing expresses environmental concerns in a mode that can be perceived as a kind of advocacy for a reasoned consumption of resources. That, in so many words, constitutes Montaigne’s thought around the environment. I choose to call it his environmental thought, since the word ecological seems much too modern to be accurate. None of these concepts exist in the French Renaissance. Ecology appears much later and is decidedly modern; it appears first as a biological notion, naming, as the Oxford English Dictionary puts it, “The branch of biology that deals with the relationships between living organisms and their environment,” and first appears in 1875, coming from the German *Oecologie*. It then seems to evolve at simultaneous speed into both the study of the relationships themselves and “The study of or concern for the effect of human activity on the environment,” around the 1960s.²⁸⁵ In French, the first known occurrence is in a scientific congress, in

²⁸⁴ See Conley’s article on the spatial movements of rivers in ““Of Cannibals’: At the mouth of the Gironde: Nicolas Sanson after Montaigne (1580-1641).” See also his *Montaigne Studies* article, ““Des Cannibales’: Essai sous le don.”

²⁸⁵ Interestingly, the first known occurrence of the word in that meaning is in a speech given by Aldous Huxley in 1963. <https://archive.org/details/AldousHuxleyspeech1962>, accessed 4/6/2017.

1910, as the *Trésor de la Langue Française* indicates. Later on, the etymology of the word will be addressed. For now, turning to the other concept of environment, one must note that it does not exist in any more significant way that ecology does. It is, however, an already formed word, a fact that matters for my analysis. It is a medieval French word, *environemenz*, appearing circa 1265 in the Brunetto Latini's *Trésor*, where it involves a circuit, a circle, and later on, the act of surrounding, in the *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. The concept itself, the modern definition of environment, is not yet determined, yet it is necessary to note here that the English word itself comes from the French *environnement*, as specified by the Oxford English Dictionary. It could be argued, moreover, that something happens around the idea of environment in the Renaissance; how else to explain that even though *environnement* is barely conceptualized yet in French, it has already translated itself to English by 1603, in a translation of Plutarch?²⁸⁶ Lexically, there is a need, in France and in England, around the turn of the century, for expressing the act of being surrounded, the mere notion of being at the center of things. As such, Montaigne's environmental thought simply signifies that Montaigne does think, reflect upon and question this *being at center*, unsettling the human situation in the nonhuman environment.

Several questions are therefore at stake in an environmental reading of "Des Cannibales" and "Des coches": in what way is the notion of waste crucial to understanding Montaigne's critique of colonization? Secondly, one must underscore the

²⁸⁶ Plutarch, *The philosophie, commonly called, the Morals, written by the learned philosopher, Plutarch of Charonea* (transl. Philemon Holland), 1st edition, 1603 (1 vol.). London: A. Hatfield. Reference given in the Oxford English Dictionary entry for "environment."

intricate relation of economics and ecology in this critique, or rather, that an early modern formulation of both capitalism and ecology crucially amounts to their impossible separation from one another. Finally, the New World chapters of Montaigne's *Essais*, once considered together, articulate a foundational paradox of what I would call the care for the environment: that the awareness of the need for a reasoned consumption of the resources (for an ecology of moderation) will frequently go hand in hand, or necessitate negotiation, with a fascination for the very same consumption of the resources, a fascination for waste. There is, after all, one modern thinker whose work discloses a similar, more pronounced paradox, and even more conflicted ecological and economic views: Georges Bataille. I argue that, in Montaigne's frantic focus on all sorts of *dépense*, the New World chapters distinctively announce what will culminate with the theory of Georges Bataille: the accursed share, that is to say, the share of paradox, in the way humans think of, apprehend, and use the environment.

The present section will be split in two parts, each chapter focusing on one of the two essays. The first chapter will establish the environmental foundations of "Des Cannibales," in the relatedness between the concepts of *habiter* [to inhabit] and *s'habiter* [getting used to], in relation to the environment. I argue that Montaigne complicates the spatial boundaries by playing with finiteness and infiniteness and by exploiting images of submersion (*engloutissement*), in order to affirm what could be called, for a start, environmental risk. More importantly, the text blurs the distinction between human and nonhuman bodies, making any New World settlement unsettling and unsettled, ultimately revealing how wasteful colonization is. What Montaigne questions, therefore, is the very sustainability of being human in the nonhuman body that is earth, in

the midst of also denouncing the failure of being human among human beings (cannibalism). The second chapter will relate one unsettling foundational image of “Des Cannibales,” that of moving bodies of land, to the moving and traveling bodies of human beings in the time of discoveries and conquest in “Des coches.” The claimed nausea at the beginning of the chapter will be turned upside down as a more general, moral and environmental nausea provoked by the expenditure of the New World. In Montaigne’s contrasted views on *dépense* and with Bataille’s *Accursed Share* in tow, and in particular in the mimetic naumachia placed in the middle of the chapter, I will expose the nausea as a result of the waste of resources, human and nonhuman.

Chapter III

Habiter et s'habituer: Getting Used to the New World in "Des Cannibales"

The title "Des Cannibales" builds up an expectation for the topic of consuming bodies. As George Hoffmann puts it, however, "Only by its last pages does "Of Cannibals" come to seem a classic that one recognizes in anthologies."²⁸⁷ Only then does Montaigne "forget[s] his first musings" and "finally disclose[s] his direct contact with three Brazilian natives [...]." Here, Hoffmann effectively overlooks or disregards, like many scholars before him, the first pages of "Des Cannibales," underestimating their significance for the whole chapter. While the essay is mostly known for its now typical but then original reversal of perspective, presenting what the "cannibals" think of Renaissance France instead of really depicting the "cannibals" themselves, I would argue that the topic of consuming bodies is much more pervasive and pertinent to the entire essay than the reader would think at first. Through these seemingly random "musings," Montaigne actually does reflect on the consumption of bodies by other bodies from the very first lines of the essay. The only difference is, arguably, one that modernity impressed upon the readers: in "Des Cannibales," the bodies consumed, the bodies consuming are not only human, they are also, and perhaps more importantly, nonhuman. Many have focused on the definition of "cannibals" as cruel or inhuman beings; the present environmental reading looks at the human and nonhuman cannibalization of the whole environment. Through that, Montaigne depicts an environment that is always somewhat unsettling, in the context of imperialistic expansion and brutal colonization.

²⁸⁷ Hoffmann, *op. cit.*, 207.

Elizabeth Guild's recent work, entitled *Unsettling Montaigne : Poetics, Ethics and Affect in the Essais and Other Writings*, emphasizes the key-notion of unsettling in the act of reading Montaigne, claiming that his "tolerant, sceptical, uncertain thinking [is] laced with anxiety" and revealing the twofold movement of the "unsettled experience, unsettling for the reader."²⁸⁸ I would argue that this notion also governs over Montaigne's experience of the environment, and, as a logical consequence, that reading Montaigne forces the reader to negotiate with the unsettling experience of their own environment.

From the beginning, "Des Cannibales" grapples with questions of space and scale. In its first mention, Montaigne identifies the New World as "cet autre monde" [this other world], introducing the eyewitness account of a man who was in his service, and who lived a decade in "la France Antarctique."²⁸⁹ Immediately after announcing this continent as inherently other, he narrows down the scope, from "monde" to "païs": "Cette découverte d'un país infiny, semble de grande consideration" ["The discovery of a boundless country seems worthy of consideration."]²⁹⁰ While the word *pays*, in modern French, refers to a territorial entity, a synonym of the nation-state, in Middle French the meaning differs quite significantly: a "région géographique habitée, plus ou moins nettement délimitée" [a geographical region that is inhabited, more or less neatly delimited]. It is likely the *less neatly* delimited dimension that interests Montaigne here.²⁹¹ In fact, "infiny" points to the idea that the New World as yet has no limits – both

²⁸⁸ Guild, Elizabeth, *Unsettling Montaigne: Poetics, Ethics and Affect in the Essais and Other Writings*, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2014, 2.

²⁸⁹ For more details, see Frisch, Andrea, *The Invention of the Eyewitness: Witnessing and Testimony in Early Modern France, North Carolina*, Chapel Hill: North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, number 279, 2004.

²⁹⁰ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 203; 182.

²⁹¹ All notes on lexicology or etymology come from the Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales.

materially, since its boundaries are still being searched for and speculated upon, and conceptually. And it is precisely the conceptual limits that are at stake in the discussion that follows: “J’ay peur que nous ayons les yeux plus grands que le ventre, et plus de curiosité, que nous n’avons de capacité: Nous embrassons tout, mais nous n’estreignons que du vent” [“I am afraid we have eyes bigger than our stomachs, and more curiosity than capacity. We embrace everything, but we clasp only wind.”]²⁹² Hence, through the ungraspability of infiniteness, Montaigne moves from a mere reflexion on knowledge in the time of the great discoveries to a declared fear about the implications of such new knowledge. Replaced in the larger context, the discussion of limits sounds like a declaration of skepticism about the colonial endeavors in the New World.

It is significant, indeed, that the metaphor chosen is one usually referring to appetite, or, more precisely, greediness, with “les yeux plus grands que le ventre.” By alluding to a kind of *gourmandise*, a sin, the text evokes, beyond the movement of knowledge-making involved in, for instance, mapping the new territory, the necessary corresponding consumption of America by colonization. Montaigne also relates the infiniteness that defines the New World with the finiteness of human capacity, of the human body. All goes as if the human body, in Montaigne’s analogy, were somehow to absorb the New World. From the very beginning of “Des Cannibales,” colonization seems to be a problem of consumption. This consumption, moreover, leads to nothing concrete, it is a vain movement: “nous n’estreignons que du vent” [“we clasp only wind”]. Here lies the paradox of colonization in the New World as it is exposed in “Des Cannibales”: regardless of the apparent infiniteness of the new continent, it is somehow

²⁹² Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 203; 182.

ungraspable. The difference lies in the slight lexical nuance between *embrasser* and *êtreindre*. While the etymology would point at the meaning of holding in one's arms in Old French, it has come to signify, by the end of the sixteenth century, "contenir, comprendre." It could therefore still be a matter of knowledge, while the second term, *êtreindre*, represents the physicality of the embrace. A paraphrase could then be: we want to understand everything, but in the end we understand nothing. Both verbs, nevertheless, in their closeness, still refer to a physical consumption, more sensual than gastronomical, although Montaigne's concept of *appétit* often subsumes both aspects.²⁹³

Indeed, for Montaigne, desires and appetites should be controlled in order to not deviate human beings from the present. Because they tend towards the future, but also because they tend towards *more* than what is merely necessary, they seem to take part in a more general philosophy of moderation and frugality. The entry in the *Dictionnaire des Essais de Montaigne* defines "désir (appétit)" with the following quote from Montaigne's chapter "Nos affections s'emportent au delà de nous" [Our feelings reach out beyond us]:

Ceux qui accusent les hommes d'aller tousjours béant apres les choses futures, et nous apprennent à nous saisir des biens presens, et nous rassoir en ceux-là, comme n'ayant aucune prise sur ce qui est à venir, voire assez moins que nous n'avons sur ce qui est passé, touchent la plus commune des humaines erreurs, s'ils osent appeler erreur chose à quoy nature mesme nous achemine, pour le service et la continuation de son ouvrage [...]. Nous ne sommes jamais chez nous, nous sommes tousjours au delà.

[Those who accuse men of always graping after future things, and teach us to lay hold of present goods and settle ourselves in them, since we have no grip on what is to come (indeed a good deal less than we have on what is past), put their finger on the commonest of human errors – if they dare to call an error something to which Nature herself

²⁹³ The *Dictionnaire des Essais de Montaigne*, while smaller than Philippe Desan's *Dictionnaire de Michel de Montaigne*, does devote an entry to "appétit" under the notion of "désir." *Dictionnaire des Essais de Montaigne*, directed by Boudou, Bénédicte, Paris: Scheer, 2011.

leads us in serving the continuation of her work [...]. We are never at home, we are always beyond.]²⁹⁴

The quote requires careful unpacking: Montaigne paints a portrait of desire and appetite as motors for consumption. He depicts an emptiness in human beings that can only be filled by those future things, “aller tousjours béant apres les choses futures.” Of course, the definition of “choses” in context does not limit itself to the mere notion of commodities, in a much larger acception. It nevertheless contains that notion, as is justified in the proximity of “choses futures” with “biens presens.” The substantive “bien” has a rich plethora of meanings attached to it, yet in the context of the quote, it does seem to correspond better to the second meaning, “[Surtout p. oppos. entre l'ordre matériel et l'ordre spirituel] Toute chose dont la possession, la jouissance (en fait ou en esprit) est considérée par l'Homme comme utile à la conservation, à l'expansion de son être.” [In particular in opposition between the material order and the spiritual one; any thing whose possession, enjoyment (in fact or in spirit) is considered by man to be useful to the conservation and expansion of his or her being²⁹⁵] Whether possession or enjoyment, to think of the ownership of goods as useful not only to one's conservation but also to one's expansion seems a fine prefiguration of what capitalism will come to be. Toying with present and future, Montaigne distinguishes between necessity (*biens presens*) and superfluous (*choses futures*). Moreover, the use of the verb “asseoir” to express the need for human beings to “settle ourselves in them,” only corroborates the argument that Montaigne really is writing about an experience of unsettlement. Yet, it also describes human beings, interestingly, as serving Nature's work and its continuation

²⁹⁴ The quote was found, in the modernized French of Montaigne, in the *Dictionnaire des Essais de Montaigne*, 152-3. The cited version is Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 15; 9.

²⁹⁵ My translation.

– an original, early modern take on what the role of man in nature is constituted of.

Finally, the sentence “we are never at home, we are always beyond” resonates strikingly with the commerce of colonization in the New World, which Montaigne depicts, as the present chapter will explore later, as getting away from one’s home and making another one someplace beyond. The detour through the third chapter of the first book of the *Essais* thus serves to demonstrate how Montaigne places colonization and commerce in the realm of mere appetites, which are superfluous and not virtuous. In “Des Cannibales”, colonization is therefore soon associated with a similarly physical image of consumption, prompted by an unidentified but definitely human – in the way errors are also human – form of greed.

Submerging Bodies of Water and Land

It becomes evident that the corporeal never strays far from the environmental, both entities being closely related, if not, I would argue, porously bound in the *Essais*. The reference to wind above is thus not uncharacteristic, and the text then turns to another meteorological element. Surrounded by various images of water and floods, the reader finds Atlantis: “[...] que, jadis et avant le deluge, il y avoit une grande Isle, nommée Athlantide, droict à la bouche du destroit de Gibraltar, qui tenoit plus de país que l’Afrique et l’Asie toutes deux ensemble [...]” [“that in days old, before the Flood, there was a great island named Atlantis, right at the mouth of the Strait of Gibraltar, which contained more land than Africa and Asia put together [...]”]²⁹⁶ Now, the meaning of the word *païs* has shifted; whereas it was used earlier to signify an inhabited geographical space, here it is a measurable quality, something solid that one holds (“tenoit plus de

²⁹⁶ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 203; 182.

païs”), such as a stretch of land. After retelling the tale of Atlantis, Montaigne concludes by describing the simultaneous, common end of the island, its inhabitants, and the Athenians who “furent engloutis par le deluge” [“were swallowed up by the Flood”].²⁹⁷ This quality of *païs* already illustrates a sensibility to the relationship between the human and the nonhuman space. In this *tenir*, there seems to be a consumption of the nonhuman by another nonhuman entity: the island possesses, in the active, corporeal aspect of the word, more body (my translation of *païs* here) than other bodies of land. The finiteness of this land has not yet been established, hence it is represented in “Des Cannibales” as a nonmoderate, paradoxical land: how can Atlantis be an island, usually conceived of as smaller than a continent, but also a whole other world? The representation of various bodies of land rattles the preconceived ideas the reader may have about continents, regions, or countries, equalizing them all in the environmental risk (the threat of the flood), but also challenging the human possession of nonhuman bodies. In this, Montaigne illustrates what was already demonstrated as being crucial to Rabelais’s depiction of bodies: the queer phenomenology (Sara Ahmed) of space and bodies, or, as Ahmed puts it, “the intercorporeal aspects of bodily dwelling.”²⁹⁸ This will be even more visible in the rest of “Des Cannibales.”

There is, of course, a risk of anachronism in subsuming the concepts of cannibalism, submersion (or *engloutissement*), erosion, or physical embrace in the overreaching notion of consumption, which carries the evidently modern connotation of consumerism. In terms of vocabulary and history, the word *consommer* has three

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 203; 182.

²⁹⁸ Ahmed, *op. cit.*, 5.

meanings. The etymological and earliest meaning, from the Latin *consummare*, signifies to destroy, to annihilate – a meaning that does not stray far from my etymological reading of the notion of waste. In Old French, its meaning is to perfect, to accomplish. Another meaning, more recent, is that of “faire disparaître (par l’usage),” which would amount to using up and wearing out. Undoubtedly, that is the modern meaning of *consommer* that survives in the notion of consumerism. Its first known occurrence is credited in the TLF to Montaigne in 1580, in the context of “consommé leurs victuailles” [using up their food.]²⁹⁹ One finds a similar evolution of the lexicology in the entry for *consommation*, where the first occurrence of the modern meaning of consumption is found, also dated back to 1580, but this time in Bernard Palissy’s *Discours admirable*, in the context of the consumption of wood. In 1611, Cotgrave’s dictionary apparently omits the recent development of *consommer*, remaining at the level of the English “consummate.” This is even stranger since the English meaning of *consume* precedes the French *consommer*, in its meaning of “to cause to disappear,” by at least two centuries. The familiarity between *consommer* and *consumer* is, moreover, a crucial distinction in Georges Bataille’s definition of expenditure, in *La Part maudite*. For now, it is enough to note that the fact that a need arises around the last decades of the sixteenth century to name the act of using up resources is telling on its own. Furthermore, the combination of the concepts listed above only goes to underline a concern for the fleetingness of things, for the disappearance and unreliability of resources around. In short, Montaigne formulates something like an anxiety for how unsustainable everything seems.

²⁹⁹ TFL, from *Essais*, I; 14.

The flood of Atlantis is the first version of *engloutissement* in relation to the New World, but certainly not the last. It commences the thread of the fight between earth and water, a thread that will resurface in “Des coches.” For now, the flood is Biblical, yet it prompts another environmental reflection, based on the awareness of a particular change: “Il est bien vray-semblable que cet extreme ravage d’eaux ait faict des changements estranges aux habitations de la terre, comme on tient que la mer a retranché la Sicile d’avec l’Italie [...]” [“It is quite likely that that extreme devastation of waters made amazing changes in the habitations of the earth, as people maintain that the sea cut off Sicily from Italy [...]”].³⁰⁰ Here, Montaigne’s environment is very much nonhuman, with the only human element being the peculiar “habitations de la terre,” which one supposes includes the human beings that do the inhabiting. Such a phrase is another example of what I would call an environmental sensibility in Montaigne: with “habitations de la terre,” the text effectively avoids and works around the human objects in the sentence, in a poetical euphemism. It could also, however, be a personification of the earth, as if each of the lands (islands or continent) were its place of dwelling or, as the Cotgrave dictionary indicates, of abiding in. It is the nonhuman that acts, the sea that cuts off the land between Sicily and Italy. The images invoke a land wasting away under the force of water, and, thanks to its exceptional dimension, conjures associations with what is now called a disaster: from the “extreme ravage d’eaux” [“extreme devastation of waters”] to the “effect incroyable d’inundation” [“an incredible result of a flood”]³⁰¹, and even to, a few lines later, the erosion of the Dordogne. The text is itself ravaged with images of

³⁰⁰ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 203; 183.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 204; 183.

lands wasting away. It could be said that before the conceptualization of all spectacular environmental events as disasters, Montaigne makes it a central theme of his essay “Des Cannibales.” The text emphasizes moments where the relationship between water and land becomes unusual, and thus remarkable (“extreme,” “incroyable”).

Disaster and Disease

The way the text of “Des Cannibales” apprehends the changing landscape of the Renaissance is by analogy to the human body. The discussion of Atlantis prompts Montaigne to consider his own local *païs*, with the Dordogne river. While the Atlantis anecdote remains suspended without a conclusion, and before the abrupt move to the topic of the Dordogne river, Montaigne places an observation that could serve as a transition from the global, mythical space of Atlantis to the local, personal space of the Dordogne: “Il semble qu’il y aye des mouvemens, naturels les uns, les autres fievreux, en ces grands corps comme aux nostres” [“It seems that there are movements, some natural, others feverish, in these great bodies, just as in our own.”]³⁰² The chiasmus opposes two different types of movements, “les uns, les autres” with two adjectives that, at first, do not seem to contradict one another, although their position in the chiasmus suggests that they do. While he opposes natural and feverish in order to contrast the slow movement – perhaps that of erosion – to the faster movement – of floods, in this context, *naturel* is synonymous with normal, whereas *fievreux* clearly denotes a disease, an infection, or an abnormal event in the body.³⁰³ In fact, Montaigne edits this sentence in the couche C into: “mouvemens maladifs et fievreux.” The observation pushes the text in the realm of

³⁰² Ibid., 204; 183.

³⁰³ For more details on the intricacies of the notions of nature and what is natural in Montaigne’s *Essais*, see Bellenger, Yvonne, “Nature” et “Naturel” dans quatre chapitres des *Essais* (Livre III, chapitres 2, 6, 8 et 10), *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, 25-26 (1978): 37-49.

medicine, since the other parallelism of the sentence – the simile – joins together human bodies and “ces grands corps.” The latter remains somewhat vague. It finds its referent somewhere between the various islands discussed and the closer “ce monde nouveau” [this new world], or even “les terres” [the lands]. What results from the observation, therefore, is the merging of lands and human beings together as “corps,” bodies, and the existence of normal and abnormal movements inside of both kinds of bodies. Appearing as floods or imminent, ongoing erosion, environmental disasters in “Des Cannibales,” are compared to diseases in the human body. They share the same randomness, and emphasize a lack of control of the human over the nonhuman, but also of the human over him or herself.

Inhabiting, comprehending the disaster

Arguably, it is at the exact moment that Montaigne explicitly dismisses his environmental thoughts in favor of the announced topic of the chapter that they become central. The previous metaphors and formulas converge into a destabilizing of what it means to possess or to inhabit a land. The consideration of the erosion of the Dordogne comes just before the chapter reaches its announced topic, cannibals, through the Aristotelian anecdote of Carthaginians who found a fertile land in the West: “Cette narration d’Aristote a non plus d’accord avec nos terres neufves” [“This story of Aristotle does not fit our new lands any better than the other.”]³⁰⁴ As he approaches the topic, however, Montaigne travels all these islands and lands in order to trace the relation of possession between a land and its inhabitants. The first mention of the key-word *païs* is bound with a possessive “leur.” The Atlantis anecdote concludes on another: “et eux, et

³⁰⁴ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 204; 184.

leur Isle furent engloutis” [“both the Athenians and themselves and their island were swallowed up [...].”]³⁰⁵ Once the text arrives at the Dordogne, it is only natural that

Montaigne moves toward his own relationship of possession with the land:

Quand je considere l'impression que *ma* riviere de Dordogne faict de mon temps, vers la rive droicte de sa descente, et qu'en vingt ans elle a tant gaigné, et desrobé le fondement à plusieurs bastimens, je vois bien que c'est une agitation extraordinaire : car si elle fust tousjours allée ce train, ou deust aller à l'advenir, la figure du monde seroit renversée.

[When I consider the inroads that my river, the Dordogne, is making in my lifetime into the right bank in its descent, and that in twenty years it has gained so much ground and stolen away the foundations of several buildings, I clearly see that this is an extraordinary disturbance; for if it had always gone at this rate, or was to do so in the future, the face of the world would be turned topsy-turvy.]³⁰⁶

The quote is where Montaigne's “musings” converge into a more fully fledged environmental thought. The word “impression,” which one annotation translates as *érosion*, actually signifies, in Middle French, a trace left by one body on another,³⁰⁷ or taking an example from the *Essais* by the *Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé*: “action d'un corps sur un autre” [the action of one body onto another].³⁰⁸ Montaigne's comments thus remain very close to the intimate relation of a body – human or nonhuman – with its movements: hence the “agitation extraordinaire,” recalling, precisely, the feverish movement. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed defines affect as, essentially, contact, and she therefore relates human and nonhuman bodies through the concept of impression: “For an object to make this impression is dependent on past histories, which

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 203; 183.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 204; 183.

³⁰⁷ From the *Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé*, ‘empreinte laissée par un corps pressé sur une surface.’

³⁰⁸ Curiously, the quote comes from the very next chapter, I, 31.

surface as impressions on the skin.”³⁰⁹ It is, in “Des Cannibales,” the skin of the land that impresses, but Montaigne stops short of saying what it impresses upon; instead, the preposition is “vers,” suggesting perhaps that the impression is much more wide-spread, that its object (what it impresses upon) is impossible to locate; instead, the reader is left with a direction, “vers,” another tendency straying away from the present, “de mon temps.” It is the future that preoccupies Montaigne, “à l’advenir.” With this anecdote, Montaigne is accounting for how such changes in these great bodies impact the human realm. In the quote, the buildings whose foundations have been stolen, imply, as well as dissimulate, a human presence. Yet whereas that human presence results from the same inhabitants who, since the beginning of the chapter, have possessed all the lands, it is also a human presence that is effaced or transformed by nature.

The reader already witnessed the variable scale of “Des Cannibales,” from infinite to the human body, and the quote brutally switches from the local (the Médoc and Montaigne’s domain) to the global, and even universal. Curiously, the mere erosion of a riverside prompts Montaigne to foresee its global impact: “la figure du monde seroit renversée” [“the image of the world would be turned topsy-turvy”]. He twists the topos of a “monde renversé,” since the past participle is gendered, referring to “figure,” defined in the Cotgrave dictionary, as anything from shape, image, to form or likeness. This constitutes a strange, potential personification of the world, since *figure* could also have meant, as it does in modern French, a portrait, or a face, troubling once more the distinction between human and nonhuman. With verbs such as “desrobé” and “renversée,” the text illustrates the instability of an environment that, etymologically,

³⁰⁹ Ahmed, *op. cit.*, 2.

surrounds the human beings, themselves represented as quite unstable in this essay.³¹⁰

This constitutes a foundational moment of disorientation in the *Essais*, insofar as the concept is defined by Sara Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology*. In her conception of it, disorientation is a thing that happens to spaces and bodies, to bodies in space, that is to say, nonhuman bodies and human ones: “The concept of “orientation” allows us then to rethink the phenomenality of space – that is, how space is dependent on bodily inhabitation.”³¹¹ “Des Cannibales” stages the phenomenological disorientation that was a consequence of the discovery of the New World, and the subsequent apprehension of new human beings, as well as the putting into question of one’s relationship to nature.

Manipulating the disease/disaster

Perhaps the effacement of the human presence by nature at the beginning of “Des Cannibales” communicates the lack of control, or agency, that human beings really have over these overbearing surroundings. From “ma riviere de Dordogne,” without any visible transition, Montaigne expands his thought to all rivers, simply by referring back to the singular “ma riviere” with the pronouns “leur” and “elles.” Rivers are the only represented agent:

Mais il leur prend des changements : Tantost elles s’espandent
d’un costé, tantost d’un autre, tantost elles se contiennent. Je ne
parle pas des soudaines inondations dequoy nous manions les
causes [...]
[But rivers are subject to changes: now they overflow in one
direction, now in another, now they keep to their course. I am not
speaking of the sudden inundations whose causes are manifest.]³¹²

³¹⁰ In Brunetto Latini’s *Trésor*, “environemenz” is what surrounds the earth, almost, it seems, but not quite, a synonym of circle: “[...]la terre [...] est assise au milieu de touz cercles et de toz environemenz, ce est au fons des ciels et des elemens.” The suggestion of a similar instability in the human beings as overarching theme of the essay has been suggested to me by Jeff Persels, whom I thank for this pregnant remark.

³¹¹ Ahmed, *op. cit.*, 6.

³¹² Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 204; 183.

While the changes might go in any and every direction, either profiting or condemning the inhabitants in the process (the binary rhythm of “tantost”), Montaigne mentions the existence of environmental movements whose causes human beings understand (“dout nous manions les causes”), such as floods. This supposes that erosion, however, is not one of these. The verb “manier,” moreover, while translated differently here, preserves the ambivalence between the meaning of understanding, which seems to be the context, and that of manipulating, managing, handling (Cotgrave). Indeed, while it would be arbitrary to claim that Montaigne places human beings as the causes of floods, the first meaning has to be that of handling, or, in more details, that human beings may provoke floods, since they know how, in order to favor their own needs and designs. It would not be surprising, since humans have long manipulated or managed their environment. But the adjective “soudaines” contradicts the ambivalence of “manions.” Instead, Montaigne really identifies other types of river changes that make the rivers sometimes exceed their banks, or contain themselves. The text sets up the importance of the limits – the river banks – before transgressing them. It also suggests, in the nonhuman environment, almost human behaviors like the whimsical “il leur prend des changements.”

Montaigne, however, clearly dismisses sudden floods because their causes are easy to understand, then moves on to the topic of the erosion of the seaside: “En Medoc, le long de la mer, mon frere Sieur d’Arsac, voit une sienne terre, ensevelie sous les sables, que la mer vomit devant elle [...]” [“In Médoc, along the seashore, my brother, the sieur d’Arsac, can see an estate of his buried under the sands that the sea spews forth

[...]”].³¹³ Similar instances of environmental unrest appear, with the possession of the land, “sienne terre,” being immediately threatened by another version of *engloutissement*, “ensevelie sous les sables.” The imagery becomes violent, with the sand being generated by the sea’s sickness, that is to say, the sea throwing up in front of herself.³¹⁴ Montaigne deplores the erosion of the coast, the rising of the sea – vomiting sand in front of itself in order to gain ground. For Montaigne and his skeptical epistemology, the real disaster lies in the environmental events whose causes humans fail to understand, regardless of how noticeable or violent they are. It is all the stranger, then, that Montaigne finds the simple, long-term, barely visible erosion more disturbing than floods, which are bound to be more spectacular and destructive.

Montaigne, then, does not care about the extent of a temporary disaster, and is more preoccupied and unsettled at the idea of a more permanent impossibility to trust the ground on which he stands. The vomiting sea is a powerful, exaggerated image to the everyday erosion of the sand. One could certainly argue that the metaphor of sickness is a more accurate representation of Montaigne’s own affect than of the process of erosion. In fact, Sara Ahmed associates sickness and throwing up to disorientation:

Moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground. Disorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one’s sense of confidence in the ground or one’s belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel livable.³¹⁵

³¹³ Ibid., 204; 183.

³¹⁴ It is significant, perhaps, that the sea in French is feminine, and that the masculine ‘grands corps’ and ‘mouvements fievreux’ have turned to a feminine river quite suddenly with the Dordogne river becoming, all of a sudden, a vague plural in ‘tantost elles s’espandent’.

³¹⁵ Ahmed, *op. cit.*, 157.

What better proof would there be that the Médoc and Dordogne anecdotes are related and crucial, and are indeed moments of disorientation? Precisely, both “Des Cannibales” and “Des coches” ultimately seem to question that such a use of the ground is sustainable, or, as Ahmed puts it, that “the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel livable.” The lexical familiarity between sustaining and supporting makes the parallel, if not completely justified, at least somewhat pertinent. In fact, the whole phrase by Sara Ahmed gives a less scientific, more humanistic wording to the notion of sustainability.

Just as the sand – personified and in the plural in the original French – poetically morphs into proper monsters, the local Médoc gives way to a more universal, actually environmental *païs*: “Ces sables sont des fourriers. Et voyons de grandes montjoies d’arenas mouvantes, qui marchent une demie lieue devant elle, et gagnent païs.” [“These sands are its harbingers; and we see great dunes of moving sand that march half a league ahead of it and keep conquering land.”]³¹⁶ The Cotgrave gives, for “fourrier”, the translation of “harbinger.”³¹⁷ With “fourriers,” Montaigne provides yet another image of *engloutissement*; “fourrier” is said to signify as early as the twelfth century, “soldat qui va au fourrage, au pillage,” thus conjuring up images of active ravaging of the land. The word also refers to a role of provisioning and stocking up on food. In its etymology, it even goes back to “fuerre” or “fourreau” [sheath], also the originary word for “fourrer” [to stuff]. The environmental therefore gains ground onto itself by an almost military movement of conquest. At the beginning of the chapter on cannibalism, whose topic is

³¹⁶ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 204; 183.

³¹⁷ Tom Conley suggested to me that “fourriers” are forerunners or agents of premonition, notably in Charles d’Orléans, in “Les fourriers d’été sont venus.”

American natives consuming one another, and the bodies of European colonizers, Montaigne piles up, like so many dunes, visions of a nonhuman environment consuming itself, and consuming human constructions. The violence that is denounced in cannibals at the time, invisible in the essay that redeems them and reverts the mirror back to Europe, instead pervades other elements of the essay, notably the interrelatedness between human and environment.

Settling as Getting Used To

Perhaps in order to compensate for such an unstable ground, Montaigne foregrounds anecdotes of lands conquered by peoples. It could be said that “Des Cannibales” is also the chapter of settling in an unsettled environment: the Carthaginians of Aristotle’s anecdote discovered “une grande isle fertile” [“a great fertile island”], prompting them to settle there: “et qu’eux, et autres depuis, attirez par la bonté et fertilité du terroir, s’y en allerent avec leurs femmes et enfans, et commencerent à s’y habituer” [“and that they, and others since, attracted by the goodness and fertility of the soil, went there with their wives and children, and began to settle there.”]³¹⁸ From inhabiting to getting used to, the etymological root slides effortlessly. “S’y habituer” embodies everything, the pronominal, personal relationship to the land, the adverbial pronoun “y” referring to a place, and the verb *habiter*, signifying, admittedly, “accoutumer” [to grow accustomed to] but also “s’établir,” the active movement of settling³¹⁹.

Therefore, the similarly digressing anecdotes that inaugurate the chapter – which are, in fact, fundamental to it – reattach themselves to the core argument in “Des

³¹⁸ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 204; 184.

³¹⁹ Cotgrave separates precisely these meanings, the first being “to use, accustom, enure, make, or frame” and the second: “to settle, practice, breed.”

Cannibales.” “S’habituer” subsumes, in an anecdote that transitions to the topic of colonization and of the cannibals, both the question of dwelling in any environment, and the issue of colonizing another land. In fact, a few lines below, Montaigne argues that cannibalism is, precisely, a matter of getting used to:

Or je trouve, pour revenir à mon propos, qu’il n’y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation, à ce qu’on m’en a rapporté : sinon que chacun appelle barbarie, *ce qui n’est pas de son usage*.

[Now, to return to my subject, I think there is nothing barbarous and savage in that nation, from what I have been told, except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice.]³²⁰

In my reading, this is where Montaigne’s conception of the environment stands, between *habiter* [dwelling] and *s’habituer* [to get used to]. Immediately comprehending an environment is impossible, since it appears rather wild and barbarous. Such a relationship as ecology takes time, and is sometimes put into danger, with stupefying and unexpected moments. Where the overwhelming majority would assume, in the Renaissance, that the human being adapts the environment for his or her own needs, Montaigne intimates that ecology (the relationship of human and nonhuman beings) is first and foremost a matter of learning to inhabit the world as it is.

Moreover, the quality of these moments, which I will qualify as disasters here, is for Montaigne different than what reason would have us believe, and goes against logic. Sudden floods, instead of being the perfect example, are an example of environmental movements that human beings do in fact comprehend, manage, or manage to comprehend. On the other hand, Montaigne centers his topic upon something as slow in its process, and hardly as noticeable as a flood, that is to say the erosion of the coast. Both environmental movements differ by their temporality. If indeed floods are sudden, they

³²⁰ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 211; 185. My emphasis.

are also soon receded. Erosion, however, is long-lasting and renders every act of dwelling inherently precarious. Thus, the text reveals the future instability of all ground – the ultimate erosion of all land against the sea, instead of a the passing risk of a flood. Montaigne’s environment is characterized by a slow, long temporality. In his refusal to focus on the sudden floods, and his deeper anxiety towards irremediable, gradual erosion, Montaigne demonstrates a care for the permanent sort of dwelling that is just as durable as it should be sustainable. His apprehension of disasters is, in that respect, much more “modern” than ours. Moreover, if usage and time are what makes the environment coherent to its inhabitants, then the movement of colonization immediately contradicts the logic put forth by the text in “Des Cannibales.” In order for a settling to be successful, for Montaigne, there needs to be a care for properly inhabiting the land, which goes from the search for knowledge to a conscience of its limits and of a reasoned consumption.

The Human and nonhuman savage

Where most scholars see in “Des Cannibales” the origins of the topos of the “bon sauvage” that will truly prosper in the eighteenth century of the Lumières, an environmental reading has to interrogate what the representation of indigenous people by Montaigne does to the moveable, changeable environment. One of the keys of “Des Cannibales” is that Montaigne’s whole argument is grounded upon the double meaning of both *sauvages* and *barbares*,³²¹ that is to say, respectively, both as savage and wild, and as violent and foreign. Yet such adjectives or nouns as these are used just as much for the

³²¹ For a brilliant analysis of this, see Duval, Edwin, *op. cit.*

environment as they are for the human beings that people it.³²² The nonhuman objects are an integral part of the argument that diffuses the criticism against cannibals:

Ils sont sauvages de mesmes, que nous appellons sauvages les fruits, que nature de soy et de son progrez ordinaire a produits: là où à la verité ce sont ceux que nous avons alterez par nostre artifice, et destournez de l'ordre commun, que nous devrions appeller plustost sauvages.

[Those people are wild, just as we call wild the fruits that Nature has produced by herself and in her normal course; whereas really it is those that we have changed artificially and led astray from the common order, that we should rather call wild.]³²³

The blame is pointed at this “nous,” human beings, who choose to arbitrarily call *sauvage* something natural when the true savagery is to alter nature by “notre artifice,” that is to say, our technique. The fact that nature would have created perfect objects, and that human beings, by coming to master nature, would have degraded it, is a well-known criticism formulated against agriculture, or even, more precisely today, against intensive agriculture and GMOs in the public sphere. In other words, two centuries before the Industrial Revolution, which many scholars deem as the beginning of the Anthropocene, wilderness is deemed good, and *our* technique is is barbaric. Therefore, the meaning of *sauvages* is moveable in the quote: one quality of *sauvage* is associated with untouched, idyllic and in particular nonhuman nature while the other, representing violence and destruction, is identified with the human.

This is where the corruption implied by the “saison si gastée” would take an ecological turn. In a barely dissimulated simile, the reader finds a condemnation of colonization, and even of agriculture: there is a corruption in the human movement

³²² In that sense, Montaigne is not without recalling Jacques Cartier and André Thevet and their earlier creation of a French wilderness.

³²³ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 205; 185.

towards nature, just as in the European movement towards the New World and its peoples. Montaigne immediately clarifies his simile:

En ceux-là sont vives et vigoureuses, les vrayes, et plus utiles et naturelles, vertus et proprietez ; lesquelles nous avons abbastardies en ceux-cy, les accommodant au plaisir de nostre goust corrompu.
[The former retain alive and vigorous their genuine, their most useful and natural, virtues and properties, which we have debased in the latter in adapting them to gratified our corrupted taste.]³²⁴

One can only notice the redundancy of Montaigne's use of the words "nature" and "naturelles," in other words, he writes that fruits created by nature have the virtue and property of being natural. Yvonne Bellenger's analysis of the uses of the words in Montaigne omits this redundancy in favor of interpreting the multiple assertions of the word in the *Essais* as a demonstration that "[p]our Montaigne, la nature est bonne, elle est pleine de sollicitude à l'égard des hommes et ceux-ci ne sauraient donc faire mieux que de la reconnaître et lui obéir."³²⁵ More than the idea of nature, however, Montaigne develops that of the *sauvage*, be it human or nonhuman. Although he still continues on the topic of fruits, the original comparison, "de mesmes, que nous appellons sauvages les fruicts," he cannot dismiss the ambivalence. Beyond natural, these virtues and attributes are also, in a ternary rhythm, that of truthfulness or perhaps authentic, and usefulness.

It is necessary to get into further details about exactly what this "artifice" could refer to. In mentioning "accommoder," and "nostre goust corrompu," Montaigne plays on the meanings of the verb in order to continue the metaphor of fruits altered because of our taste – "accommoder" also refers, in the realm of cookery, to "apprêter des aliments pour un repas selon des recettes appropriées." Therefore, the mere seasoning of fruits with

³²⁴ Ibid., 205; 185.

³²⁵ Bellenger, Yvonne, *op. cit.*, 38.

sugar or spices is also part of this corruption and bastardization of *techne*. This is important, because in one of Montaigne's most well-known and most cited passage from "Des coches," he deplores that the spoliation of the New World has been brought about because of "la negotiation des perles et du poivre."³²⁶ "Accommoder," in its culinary meaning, thus crucially interrogates the necessity and utility of superfluous elements, such as spices, upon which a whole global commerce with the Indies, and also the New World, rely. This argument is pursued further below, when, describing the land of the cannibals, and upon mentioning the great abundance of fish and meats, Montaigne points out that the natives "les mangent sans autre artifice, que de les cuire." ["and they eat them with no other artifice than cooking"]³²⁷ The reiteration of the word "artifice" always notifies the reader that, in a way, anything that is not simple and natural is superfluous and not useful.

What Artifice?

If Montaigne's artifice seems to be a form of excess, the exact nature of the artifice is questionable. A synonym of *techne* or technology, in the context of "Des Cannibales," it refers both to cooking and to agriculture, both of which the natives are deprived of. In short, artifice is culture as opposed to nature. Obviously, scientists have long acknowledged and studied the existence of a thorough, well-rounded agriculture in pre-Columbian America.³²⁸ One can only wonder what, in the sixteenth-century, could be so objectionable in *techne* for Montaigne; here, he differentiates nature from culture quite clearly, and declares a preference for the former. Whereas it is understandable that a

³²⁶ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 910.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 207; 186.

³²⁸ For more details, see Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, and Charles C. Mann's *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus*.

natural plenty and fertility could be so admired in the New World, as seemed to be the premise when reading Cartier and Thévet, Montaigne's explicit dismissal of culture seems to hint at a more problematic notion than originally thought. Yet Montaigne does explain his skepticism about culture: just after he adds that many have found excellent the fruits of the New World, "sans culture," he goes on to observe : "Ce n'est pas raison que l'art gaigne le poinct d'honneur sur nostre grande et puissante mere nature." [It is not reasonable that art should win the place of honor over our great and powerful mother Nature."]³²⁹ A common idea of modern ecology could be identified here, with the apparent, objective progress (be it *techne*, agriculture, cooking or seasoning) being debunked by as vague and subjective a notion as taste: in other words, the fruits that are picked up in the wild are better than those bought at the store, or at the market, already in the Renaissance.³³⁰

This is undoubtedly one of the instances of Montaigne's surprising reverence for nature – Yvonne Bellenger remarks how, in the sixteenth-century, authors are more prone to qualify nature as a bad stepmother, a "marâtre," and that Montaigne is therefore very much an exception. It is even the stranger when one considers the previously discussed instability of natural disasters at the beginning of "Des Cannibales." Artifice soon takes another meaning, that of "inventions": "Nous avons tant rechargé la beauté et richesse de ses ouvrages par noz inventions, que nous l'avons du tout estouffée." ["We have so overloaded the beauty and richness of her works by our inventions that we have quite

³²⁹ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 205-6; 185.

³³⁰ In many arguments for organic farming against intensive agriculture and GMOs, science is not given as much weight as the mere taste of fruits and vegetables. See also Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*.

smothered her.”]³³¹ This will be, in fact, one main topic of “Des coches” – and indeed illustrates the existence of an environmental thread between both chapters. The verb “recharger” is particularly fascinating: it supposes that nature’s works were previously discharged – evoking a load, or even the modern meaning of energy.³³² Pushing the argument even further, such a loading up leads not to increased beauty and richness, but rather to a suffocating nature. It also recalls the compensating force at work in Conley’s study of ruin in “Des Cannibales.” The verb itself is a surplus, word with which it shares a superfluous prefix. How does the load or charge or the works of nature become unloaded, and in need for a recharge? Regardless of how the reader wants to read the chapter, there is definitely something wrong in the process lying between creative nature and the intervention of man. In short, Montaigne himself seems exhausted by his wasted century, and by the same movement nature is also exhausted. “Recharger” and “estouffée” both point at the notion of excess. For the first time in this chapter, Montaigne expresses shame “à noz vaines et frivoles entreprinses” [“our vain and frivolous attempts.”]³³³ – a feeling that will be repeated and intensified in the topic of “Des coches.”

Through the notion of artifice, it is the full spectrum of early modern commerce that the chapter contemplates. Montaigne soon lists all the deplorable things that the New World is happily deprived of. The first on his list, perhaps thus the most important, is commerce: “C’est une nation, diroy-je à Platon, en laquelle il n’y a aucune espee de trafique [...]” [“This is a nation, I should say to Plato, in which there is no sort of traffic

³³¹ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 206; 185.

³³² This is already a demonstration of the similarities with Bataille’s thought.

³³³ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 206; 185.

[...]”³³⁴ A few elements of the list later, Montaigne adds “nulle agriculture; nul metal; nul usage de vin ou de bled.” [“no agriculture, no metal, no use of wine or wheat.”] The previous elements were more abstract (to cite a few, letters, numbers, contracts, magistrate...), these on the other hand are crucially directed at this “trafique.” The production of wheat and wine leads to commerce, just like the fabrication or the extraction of metal. What Montaigne lists here is a series of potential commodities. Wine and wheat –by which certainly the reader should understand wine and bread—are the sixteenth-century staples of a diet, the early modern processed foods that are thus exchangeable, marketable. Using the word *trafique* is, moreover, significant, in the sense that in the Renaissance, it already carried the double meaning of, admittedly, trade and commerce, but also, as the Cotgrave dictionary indicates, “to deceive, beguile, overreach.” Such an association of words is quite fitting for the colonialization of the New World, read through the texts of Las Casas. Montaigne’s knowledge of the Spanish conquest could hint at the fact that a more blatant, economic, social and humanist critique of colonialization and early modern commercialization is indeed present in the *Essais*.

By pretending that the natives of America possess none of these objects, the text crucially removes them from any potential “trafique” with Europeans – already well under-way by the time Montaigne writes the *Essais*. Whether Montaigne attempts to shield the natives from the European cruelty he already knows about, or whether he perhaps seeks to protect the New World from a waste, in all its implications and meanings, that he perceives in France (“une saison si gastée”), what he clearly states is his moral opposition to all the forms of colonization led by “trafique.”

³³⁴ Ibid., 206; 186.

Colonizing as Inherently Wasteful

Through his critique of commerce, Montaigne empties out the argument for the necessity to colonize the New World. In an already-discussed anecdote, the Carthaginians discovered “une grande isle fertile, toute revestue de bois, et arrosée de grandes et profondes rivières, fort esloignée de toutes terres fermes.” [“a great fertile island, all clothed in woods and watered by great deep rivers, far remote from any mainland.”]³³⁵ The description, while it seems to fit the recently discovered Americas perfectly, is soon qualified as different: “Cette narration d’Aristote n’a non plus d’accord avec nos terres neuves.” Instead, the relationship of the anecdote with the rest of the essay could be that of a cautionary tale for an unsustainable colonization. Following the colonization of this island by many Carthaginians, the governing body of the city, “les Seigneurs de Carthage,” realizes that the situation, on the long term, is not tenable: “voyans que leur pays se dépeuploit peu à peu,” [“seeing that their country was gradually becoming depopulated”] they forbade the act of colonization, of settlement. Therefore, in the anecdote, the fantasy of the potential “bonté et fertilité du terroir” leads to the specter of population depletion, and, ultimately, ruin (“ruinassent leur estat.”) Explicitly, what the governors fear is the multiplication of the settlers’ population, and the consequent turning against their homeland.³³⁶ Insofar as the New World brandishes extreme abundance as well, the anecdote is not so much in disagreement (“plus d’accord,”) with the rest of the essay, and only brings the idea of ruin to a text already concerned with instability or insecurity, announcing the apocalyptic tone of “Des coches.”

³³⁵ Ibid., 204; 184.

³³⁶ This is precisely echoed in “Des coches.”

In fact, ruin could be said to be a chorus in the New World chapters of the *Essais*. At the crucial moment of introducing the three natives that Montaigne met, at the end of the chapter, the reader's curiosity for their message gets diffused by another typical (seemingly) digressive observation. The sentence starts with "trois d'entre eux" and soon veers towards the topic of the ruin of the New World, otherwise omitted since the beginning of the chapter:

[...] ignorans combien couettera un jour à leur repos, et à leur bon heur, la cognoissance des corruptions de deçà, et que de ce commerce naistra leur ruine, comme je presuppose qu'elle soit des-jà avancée [...].
[ignorant of the price they will pay some day, in loss of repose and happiness, for gaining knowledge of the corruptions of this side of the ocean; ignorant also of the fact that of this intercourse will come their ruin (which I suppose is already well advanced [...])] ³³⁷

The temporality of this observation is ambivalent, with on the one hand the future cost of colonization being postponed to some day ("un jour"), and yet the certainty of the future, "de ce commerce naistra leur ruine." On the other hand, the presupposition is that, in the subjunctive but also the past, that ruin is *already* well under way, "avancée."

This ruin has to do with *trafique*, which implies colonization. Curiously, the natives who, beforehand in the essay, are pictured as deprived of "aucune espee de trafique," get introduced at the end of the essay as actively agreeing to the trade that colonization is, "ce commerce." Clearly different from the previously described *bons sauvages*, these three are somehow guilty. Curiosity for novelty is their mistake, demonstrating that they have already been tainted by the corrupting influence of our own need for faraway lands: "bien miserables de s'estre laissez pipper au desir de la nouvelleté [...]." This "nouvelleté" recalls the reference to "nos terres neufves" that

³³⁷ Ibid., 213; 193.

directly followed the Carthaginian cautionary tale. “Nouvelleté” is an excess, perhaps because it fails to inscribe itself in a sustainable temporality, just like the “curiosité” of the beginning of “Des Cannibales.”

The Sustainability of the Natives

It seems obvious that in contrast with the corruption of Europe and Europeans, the *sauvages* would appear as extremely admirable beings. Montaigne’s eulogy of the natives, as scholars have demonstrated, is in no way particularly new. Jacques Cartier, Jean de Léry and André Thevet established the terrain for such a vision of the *bon sauvage* decades before. Admiration for their nudity, their innocence, the straightforwardness of their customs is therefore neither innovative nor surprising, although it remains canonical, and the main reason that “Des Cannibales” is such a classic. The indigenous people’s simplicity refuses the wastefulness that Montaigne deplores in his own century, in the “old” world. Instead, it is in the interpretation of their military practices that a poignant critique of colonization can be found. Exalting the arbitrary beauty of their wars among themselves, Montaigne paradoxically observes their lack of imperialistic views:

Ils ne sont pas en debat de la conqueste de nouvelles terres : car ils jouyssent encore de cette uberté naturelle, qui les fournit sans travail et sans peine, de toutes choses necessaires, en telle abondance, qu’ils n’ont que faire d’agrandir leurs limites.
[They are not fighting for the conquest of new lands, for they still enjoy that natural abundance that provides them without toil and trouble with all necessary things in such profusion that they have no wish to enlarge their boundaries.]³³⁸

The quote resonates with the “païs infiny” of the first page of the essay, and the discussion of capacity that followed. Clearly, Montaigne’s already discussed concern for

³³⁸ Ibid., 210; 189.

limits, hereby implies that the possession of “nouvelles terres” – indeed very similar to “nos terres neufves” – is always already superfluous.

Yet the quote also represents an undeniable paradox, denouncing Montaigne’s description as extremely idealistic and probably erroneous. Since the cannibals are not an accurately defined people, and instead, a variety of indigenous people of the France Antarctique who have in common the practice of cannibalism, it is illogical that all of those people should lack, as Montaigne pretends, an expansionary ambition. Otherwise, how would there even be any wars to witness, or any cannibalistic practices against their enemies to report on? All Montaigne provides as a reason for their wars is a doubtful, vague description: “Leur guerre est toute noble et genereuse, et a autant d’excuse et de beauté que cette maladie humaine en peut recevoir : elle n’a autre fondement parmy eux, que la seule jalousie de la vertu.” [“Their warfare is wholly noble and generous, and as excusable and beautiful as this human disease can be; its only basis among them is their rivalry in valor.”]³³⁹ In other words, the cause of war would be the constant improvement of virtue, by which perhaps the reader is to understand courage and bravery. The irrationality of the argument, however, does not erase the cultural distinction made in this certainly mistaken observation. It is undeniable that, at the risk of appearing illogical, Montaigne wants the reader to see, in the cannibals, a philosophy of frugality and moderation.

He depicts them as situated away from the corruption of an early consumerist society, where they simply do not develop desires for anything more than what is strictly necessary: “Ils sont encore en cet heureux point, de ne desirer qu’autant que leurs

³³⁹ Ibid., 210; 189.

necessitez naturelles leur ordonnent : tout ce qui est au-delà, est superflu pour eux.”

[“They are still in that happy state of desiring only as much as their natural needs demand; anything beyond that is superfluous to them.”] It is extremely ironic that, in other, usual accounts about the New World, the topos of a sustainable *sauvage* should be developed in the very middle of texts that usually encourage colonization such as Cartier and Thévet. In Montaigne, however, it partakes in a thorough critique. If the *sauvages* can be content with only what is necessary, the text does not need to expose the absurdity of conquering the New World. By idealizing the *sauvages*, arguably on purpose, Montaigne negatively depicts colonization as absolutely useless, and in fact, “superflu[e].”

Through the various twists and turns of its argument, “Des Cannibales” illustrates a rich, manifold vision of how to perceive the world at the end of the sixteenth century. Montaigne stages various anecdotes of human beings throughout history and mythology, settling in new lands, or endangered by changes in the old lands, from Atlantis to Carthage, from Médoc to the France Antarctique. It is extremely difficult and problematic, in “Des Cannibales,” to pretend to possess a land. In the process, the multiple movements of zooming in and out from local landscapes to a global world manage to shatter, and simultaneously multiply, a sense of dwelling and inhabiting any land. At the center of all these anecdotes, however, the discovery and subsequent colonization of the New World stands as the game-changer of the century; if Montaigne’s epistemology is shaken, it is because it tries to assimilate the New World, its indigenous people, its commodities, with the knowledge of a global, changeable world, and of the limits of it all. When presented with a new stretch of land, if Europeans can only consume and absorb it, if their appetite and curiosity cannot be diminished, what is to

become of the already unsettling world? The ground upon which the text stands is neither solid nor safe, an impression that will be emphasized in “Des coches.” The New World has revealed that the “agitation extraordinaire” of human and nonhuman beings alike was a potential risk for all. Behind Montaigne’s concern for how unsustainable everything seems to be in the wake of Columbus lies a deep skepticism for the implications of colonization, establishing the need to take into account the long-term consequences of impacting the environment, of bringing culture and technology, in the face of nature.

Chapter IV

“Des coches”: The Nausea of Expenditure in the New World

After the submersions, the crumbling buildings of Renaissance Medoc, “Des coches” stages ravages and the general ruin of the Inca and Aztec empires, provoked, this time, by humans only. Once a place of relative abundance and natural fertility in “Des Cannibales,” the America that is represented in “Des coches” is devastated.³⁴⁰ Indeed, the chapter ends with insistant visions of pointless spoliation. About the Spanish conquest, Montaigne writes: “Dieu a meritoirement permis que ces grands pillages se soient absorbez par la mer en les transportant [...]” [God deservedly allowed this great plunder to be swallowed up by the sea in transit [...]]³⁴¹ On the other hand, evoking “plusieurs puissants Roys,” that is to say, indigenous kings, Montaigne explains that they “espuisoiert tousjours leurs mines.” [“who were constantly exhausting their mines”]³⁴² Thus, the resources do not seem endless anymore, and in fact, they are explicitly exhausted in some parts, with the very finite mines emptied of their precious content, or the content of Spanish lootings being lost at sea, in a gratuitous spontaneous vanishing of the surplus they represented. In many ways, Montaigne depicts an irremediably Bataillean vision of excess. Hence, when the text nears the end of the chapter, it is clear that “cette premiere abondance de richesses, qu’on rencontra à l’abord de ces nouvelles terres [...]” [to the abundance of riches that was first encountered in these new lands] has

³⁴⁰ As already illustrated in the introduction, devastation is one form of the etymologically richer notion of waste, through the Latin verb “vastare.”

³⁴¹ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 913: 847.

³⁴² For more details on mining in the New World and in this essay, see Phillip John Usher’s upcoming book, *On the Exterranean*.

turned into the past tense, and is perhaps not as conspicuous as it used to be.³⁴³ In “Des coches,” the New World is already a wasteland, fitting the tale of the five ages of the sun in Mayan tradition that Montaigne relates at the very end of the chapter.

Vision of Excess

“Des Cannibales” concluded on a denunciation of excess, in what could be dismissed as a disposable comment made by the three natives interviewed by Montaigne. They have indeed observed “qu’il y avoit parmy nous des hommes pleins et gorgez de toutes sortes de commoditez, et que leurs moitez estoient mendiants à leurs portes, décharnez de faim et de pauvreté [...]” [“that there were among us men full and gorged with all sorts of things, and that their other halves were beggars at their doors, emaciated with hunger and poverty”]³⁴⁴ It would be misguided to interpret this as Montaigne merely denouncing poverty. What the natives fail to comprehend, in their *naïveté*, is inequality, that is to say, the gap between extreme poverty and excessive consumption. The exact words chosen crucially illustrate an early consumerist society, with the redundant binary of “pleins et gorgez,” suggesting, with the etymology of “gorge” – which recalls very real images Gargantua and Pantagruel – that individuals physically consumed and absorbed “all sorts of commodities.” “Gorgez” is the unnecessary supplement to “plein,” the overflowing signifier; while “plein” is a neutral word, “gorgez” comes to add the derogatory connotation of excess and saturation. In the mid-sixteenth century, *commodités* was used to signify “richesses” (in Saint Gelys), while in the beginning of the seventeenth century, Olivier de Serres uses it in the sense of “aises,” closer to the

³⁴³ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 913; 847.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 214; 193.

etymology of comfort, “facilité.”³⁴⁵ For a word that will come to signify so much in Karl Marx’s work on *Capital* to appear in “Des Cannibales,” one of the two essays that deplore the spoliation of the New World by commerce and conquest, together with a denunciation of economic inequality is significant, without having to give way to anachronism and teleological interpretations.

It could then be remarked that if “Des Cannibales” concludes on such images of superfluity and saturation, “Des coches” also commences with similar considerations. At the beginning of “Des coches,” Montaigne reflects on the fact that great authors who write about causes use both true facts and false ones, if only, he claims, the latter have “quelque invention et beauté.” [“some originality and beauty”]³⁴⁶ This introduces the concern for utility next to that, already-mentioned, for truthfulness in literature: “Ils disent assez veritablement et utilement, s’ils disent ingenieusement” [They speak truly and usefully enough if they speak ingeniously.] Immediately after, beauty, invention and ingenuity are granted derogatory connotations of disorder and excess, with the amassing of causes into a pile, “nous en entassons plusieurs.” [“we pile up several of them”] While Montaigne’s initial explicit topic is the exposition of causes in rhetorics, the underlying comment on usefulness and superfluity will soon demonstrate the thematic preponderance of that contrast in the rest of the essay. In fact, ingenuity and invention will resurface towards the end, in a discussion of the vanity of human endeavors. Where “Des Cannibales” ends on the note of comfort as an excess, and excessive *commoditez*, “Des coches” begins on the value of wasteful concepts such as invention, beauty, and

³⁴⁵ *Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé*, entry for “commodité.”

³⁴⁶ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 899; 831.

ingeniosity.³⁴⁷ This soon merges into the topic of bodily waste with the discussion of the causes of sneezing. In many ways, it feels as if the whole outline of “Des coches” lies in determining when the wasteful is admirable from when it is deplorable, when it is useful as opposed to wasteful.

Montaigne’s nausea, the environment between comfort zone and risk

An even more striking resemblance, in fact, between both essays is their expression of a similar environmental discomfort. In order to expose the development and gradation of what I call Montaigne’s environmental discomfort, it is necessary to pay close attention to how the text itself unfolds, in its logical order, slowly building up, in the background, the sense of an uneven and unstable relationship between the human and the environment. With the title “Des coches” as a guiding thread, the idea of transportation spans the chapter from Montaigne’s own *coche* in the first pages to that of the last king of Peru, Atahualpa, who dies while being transported on his golden chair in the very last words. Yet before Montaigne even reaches the first “coche” of the chapter, a discussion of bodily winds gives way to various reflections and anecdotes on the topic of fear, resulting in what I would call the nausea thread, which surfaces once more – after “des Cannibales” – with Montaigne’s description of his own motion sickness. In fact, such a notion follows a more general sense of sickness in the narrative, which fittingly depicts a sneeze and various types of bodily effluvia in the very first lines, following the reflection on the hoarding of causes in great authors: “Me demandez-vous d’où vient

³⁴⁷ Of course, one could find such a beginning even more interesting once considered alongside Patricia Parker’s *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* or Terence Cave’s *The Cornucopian Text*. For the sake of concision, let us merely underline that Montaigne begins “Des coches,” a chapter about excess – in my reading – with a reflection on the utility of *copia* in rhetoric.

cette coustume, de benire ceux qui esternuent? Nous produisons trois sortes de vent”

[“Do you ask me whence comes this custom of blessing those who sneeze? We produce three sorts of wind.”]³⁴⁸ The text, it seems, abruptly turns to the supposed main topic of transportation, reflecting on “la cause du souslevement d’estomach, qui advient à ceux qui voyagent en mer” [“the reason for the heaving of the stomach that afflicts those who travel by sea [...]”]. Sea and sickness thus appear conceptually joined again, after the *vomissement* of the sea in Medoc in “Des Cannibales.”

From then on, the text will oscillate between sea-sickness and nausea, and between the personal, individual nausea to that of the overarching environment. In the word choice of nausea, I intend to refer to several conceptions of it: first, the existential nausea of Jean-Paul Sartre, but also its interpretation by French phenomenologists and, more recently, its centrality to the idea of disorientation in Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*.³⁴⁹ In her book, she highlights sea-sickness as a key-concept in Jacques Rolland’s explication of Levinas’s short essay “On Escape.” Rolland, who is also Levinas’s translator in this case, points out the etymological familiarity, in French, between nausea and sea-sickness: “Note that, in French, “upset stomach,” “heartburn,” or feeling “sick at heart” are called *mal au coeur*, just as “seasickness” is also conceived a “*mal*,” *mal de mer*. The English “sickness” or “ills” do not have the same conceptual extension as the French *mal*, which, adjectivally, functions for physiological, moral, and

³⁴⁸ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 899; 832. Of course, it is difficult not to refer back to “Des Cannibales,” which started with “nous n’embrassons que du vent.”

³⁴⁹ Perhaps illogically or in reverse, I will start by describing the necessity of the concept of nausea before explaining the overarching role of *Queer Phenomenology* in my reading of Montaigne.

aesthetic situations.”³⁵⁰ In Montaigne’s depiction of his soul being invaded by fear, the “lecteur bon nageur”³⁵¹ soon distinguishes the same state of unrest as “des Cannibales”:

A chasque charge qui me vient, je me presente et oppose, en mon haut appareil. Ainsi la premiere qui m’emporteroit, me mettroit sans resource. Je n’en fais point deux. Par quelque endroit que le ravage fauçast ma levée, me voylà ouvert, et noyé sans remede.³⁵²
[Each attack made on me I meet and fight off in my full armor; thus the first one that swept me off my feet would leave me without resources. I have no secondary defense: no matter where the torrent should break my dike, I would be helpless and be drowned for good.]

Metaphorically, Montaigne’s way of describing his soul in the throws of a passionate fear recalls “des Cannibales,” with the levee (a human construction against floods), and his conditional drowning, another echo of *engloutissement*. Even more compelling is the fact that the main attacker here is “le ravage” [devastation], that is to say a vivid image of the etymological waste [*vastare*]. Since Montaigne does use the word *inondations* [floods] in “Des Cannibales,” the choice of “ravage” here, whereas the image conveyed is explicitly that of a flood, is significant; in the singular, it appears to refer to a more abstract but also more universal sense of waste, that is to say, here, of devastation. It is also a rare occurrence of Montaigne actually embodying a nonhuman entity, a river held together by a levee, and yet irremediably open to the surrounding world, “me voylà ouvert.” What Montaigne’s metaphor represents distinctly is a human body all too permeable to the

³⁵⁰ Levinas, Emmanuel, *On Escape*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003. This is from his translator’s note, p. 104.

³⁵¹ The quote refers to the passage in “De l’expérience” where the reader is represented as swimming in, one supposes, tempestuous waters, a metaphor that many Montaigne scholars underline as being an accurate representation of what a reader needs to do in order to understand the *Essais*. For an analysis of the metaphor, see Zoé Samaras, “Le “lecteur bon nageur” et l’espace d’écriture dans les *Essais*,” in *Montaigne: Espace, voyage, écriture. Actes du congrès international de Thessalonique, 23-25 septembre 1992*, (Paris: Champion, 1995), 225-33.

³⁵² Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 900; 833.

world since, as Sara Ahmed puts it, “spaces are not exterior to bodies.”³⁵³ Truthfully, there does not seem to be, at such a moment, an inside and an outside, a human body and a nonhuman environment. Montaigne’s phenomenology is already a queer phenomenology, where spaces impress on the body, where bodies extend into space.

While “ceux qui voyagent en mer” are soon associated to the *conquistadores* or merchants in the chapter, Montaigne separates himself from this sort of commercial or military movement. After mentioning the “heaving of the stomach,” he distances his symptoms from what is usually thought to cause sea-sickness, that is to say fear: “Moy qui y suis fort subject, sçay bien, que cette cause ne me touche pas” [“I, who am very subject to seasickness, know very well that this cause does not affect me.”]³⁵⁴ The discussion therefore continues on the subject of fear, only to return to a more general, all-encompassing and undeniable sense of motion sickness: “Or je ne puis souffrir long temps (et les souffrois plus difficilement en jeunesse) ny coche, ny littiere, ny bateau, et hay toute autre voiture que de cheval, et en la ville, et aux champs” [“Now I cannot long endure (and I could endure them less easily in my youth) either coach, or litter, or boat; and I hate any other transportation than horseback, both in town and in the country.”]³⁵⁵ With the verb *souffrir*, whose principal meaning in modern French is to suffer, but whose second meaning was more prominent in Middle French, to bear or to endure something, one cannot help but recall the “s’y habituer” of “Des Cannibales.” To endure a movement, or to get accustomed to a new place both point at a form of negotiation with an uneasy environment, one that, whether natural or artificial, challenges the usual

³⁵³ Ahmed, Sara, *op. cit.*, 8.

³⁵⁴ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 899; 832.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 900; 833.

environment. In fact, they both constitute moments of disorientation, of which phenomenology is full, as Sara Ahmed writes. She adds that sea-sickness, in the way Jacques Rolland defines it for Levinas, is a disorientation. Settling in a new land or settling one's stomach on a boat both involve that the individual seeks to go beyond, to exceed his or her usual surroundings – what usually surrounds them (*ce qui les environne*). It literally involves getting out of one's comfort zone. Once the ground becomes uncomfortable, inhospitable, an environmental act of negotiation or adaptation is necessary, that could be another dimension of ecology. Therefore, is it indeed *un mal des transports* that Montaigne is describing, or a more general nausea for the instability of his ground, for environmental unrest? Is this nausea a metaphor for exceeding one's natural limits?

At first, the sickness is directed at the sea with “ceux qui voyagent en mer,” implying perhaps that transatlantic voyage is the disease of this wasted century.³⁵⁶ Yet the unease becomes more general, and at the same time more personal: “Par cette legere secousse, que les avirons donnent, desrobant le vaisseau sous nous, je me sens brouiller, je ne sçay comment, la teste et l'estomach: comme je ne puis souffrir sous moy un siege tremblant” [“By that slight jolt given by the oars, stealing the vessel from under us, I somehow feel my head and stomach troubled, as I cannot bear a shaky seat under me.”] The unrest is powerfully represented by the “secousse,” the verb “brouiller,” and the vivid image of a “siege tremblant.” Indeed, before it came to signify the mere spot one sits on, a *siege* was “la place que l'on occupe” [the place one occupies] or even “lieu où

³⁵⁶ It is possible here to remark the influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where voyage signifies the end of the Golden Age, since Ovid also connects the creation of boats with the beginning of war.

est établie une autorité” [the place where an authority is established]. The Latin *sedes* is, in fact, another word for *habitation* or *domicile*. Would it thus be eccentric, when Montaigne writes of his “siege tremblant,” to consider the various images of consumption, *engloutissement*, and the repetition of *desrober* in this quotation, as hinting at a certain perception of environmental disorientation as a risk? Moreover, the key-word *habituer*, close to *souffrir*, could evoke the formulation of a concern for something like sustainability. Indeed, how is the human being to *endure* in the face of such crumbling buildings, such a moveable terrain?

Allow the reading to become more metaphorical: far from being only a sea-sickness, therefore, what Montaigne seems to build up is a more general unease or disease provoked by general travel, from “Des Cannibales” to “Des coches”: “C’est un remuement interrompu, qui m’offense : et plus, quand il est languissant.” [“It is an interrupted motion that annoys me, and most of all when it is languid.”] Of course, this could very well be a mere observation on motion sickness, offering a transition from the discussion of various causes to that of coaches. The general topic of the chapter, however, a denunciation – quite original for the time, as it has been noted many times – of the destruction of the New World, seems to point at a more meaningful analogy. It could be argued that Montaigne conveniently removes himself from any participation to the race towards the New World, because he is physically unable to travel for long periods of time. On the other hand, the coaches and boats of the chapter all lead to the New World, and to its spoliation. The nausea, such a strong reaction, whose cause Montaigne does not explain further – he denies any logic to the usual cause of fear – must find its origin somewhere. The “remuement interrompu,” I suggest, could metaphorically be that of the

boats departing for America, only to shipwreck in the middle of the Atlantic by the end of the chapter, the same boats that appear in the Roman naumachia described at length in the middle of the essay. More than a thematic thread, they all veer towards the same conclusion: the discovery of the New World, and the subsequent commerce of objects and humans amount, for Montaigne, to turning the world topsy-turvy indeed, leaving humanity to get used to its consequences, with a moral and environmental nausea.

Dépense et durée: luxury or moderation?

This particular environmental and moral nausea can hardly escape an intersection with economic problems – the *trafique* successfully haunts “Des coches,” in a more significant way than it did in “Des Cannibales.”³⁵⁷ What “Des coches” takes up, behind the announced topic of coaches, is the issue of luxury and of *dépense*, the notion of transportation providing a bridge between the topics. Motion sickness thus gives way to seemingly whimsical anecdotes about various eccentric coaches, with point of references in Antiquity, whether Greek or Roman: “L’Empereur Firmus fit mener son coche, à des Autruches de merveilleuses grandeur, de maniere qu’il sembloit plus voler que rouler.” [“The Emperor Firmus had his chariot drawn by ostriches of marvelous size, so that it seemed rather to fly than to roll.”]³⁵⁸ This anecdote is where the topics of coaches and eccentricity diverge, leading to a digression on the obsessive taste for luxury in sovereigns: “L’estrangeté de ces inventions, me met en teste cett’autre fantasie : Que c’est une espece de pusillanimité, aux monarques, et un tesmoignage de ne sentir point assez, ce qu’ils sont, de travailler à se faire valloir et paroistre, par *despences excessives*.”

³⁵⁷ It was merely suggested there, with “et que de ce commerce naistra leur ruyne, comme je presuppose qu’elle soit desjà avancée [...]” [ignorant also of the fact that of this intercourse will come their ruin (which I suppose is already well-advanced”] Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 213; 193.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 902; 835.

[“The strangeness of these inventions puts into my head this other notion: that it is a sort of pusillanimity in monarchs, and evidence of not sufficiently feeling what they are, to labor at showing off and making a display by excessive expense.”³⁵⁹]. Montaigne begins his study of the notion of *dépense* by a likeness between strange inventions and “cett’ autre fantasie,” that is to say, another superfluous idea – Cotgrave defines “fantasie” as “the fancie, or fantasie; opinion, humor, imagination, conceit, affection, judgement.” It is preposterous for kings to spend excessive amounts of money only to make a display or add value to their own appearance.

If Montaigne, however, explicitly criticizes the excessive spending of kings, he does not condemn spending in itself, and lists examples of proper usage of *dépense*:

L’emploitte me sembleroit bien plus royale, comme plus utile, juste et durable, en ports, en havres, fortifications et murs : en bastiments sumptueux, en Eglises, hospitaux, colleges, reformation de rues et de chemins [...].

[The outlay would seem to me much more royal as well as more useful, just, and durable, if it were spent on ports, harbors, fortifications, and walls, on sumptuous buildings, churches, hospitals, colleges, and the improvement of streets and roads].³⁶⁰

Montaigne seems to distinguish good spending from excessive spending as a question of utility for the common good, a notion that Daniel Ménager finds to be coherent with discussions of spending at the time.³⁶¹ The list encompasses various types of infrastructure, which have always been associated with power and government. The listed objects evoke a connected world in need of more communication, with commercial and military concerns (ports or walls). The rest is more aesthetic, like the “bastiments

³⁵⁹ My emphasis.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 902; 835.

³⁶¹ See Daniel Ménager, ‘Montaigne et la magnificence’, *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, vol. 29-32 (1992), pp 63-71.

sumptueux” or the renovation of streets, together with services of care for the citizens, like churches, hospitals and schools. In addition, the trilogy of useful, fair and durable, that seems to equate the term of “royale,” for the modern reader, conjures up ecological considerations. Might Montaigne be formulating here an early concern for the sustainability of *dépense*? The definition of sustainability itself uses the same concepts, implying the consideration of utility, fairness, and the future: “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”³⁶² It implies durable investments like the ones Montaigne lists, a care for usefulness and necessity above all, improving instead of building anew, and a consideration for future generations as well. As exposed above in the Introduction, the concepts of time and duration, of durability, are an inherent part of the etymological implications of ‘sustainable.’

Montaigne’s vocabulary, since “des Cannibales,” betrays an environmental concern that could translate into advocacy for a reasoned consumption of resources, instead of their waste – this would certainly be the teleological, anachronistic interpretation. As usual, with Montaigne, his focus on excessive spending does not necessarily entail a coherent argument on what a good sort of *dépense* would be. Presently, the reader will notice a discordant element in the list of practical, durable constructions: exactly how useful are these “bastiments sumptueux”?

Fascination for sumptuous dépense

³⁶² The definition comes from the 1987 Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development.

Even though neither capitalism nor ecology are yet conceptualized, of course, Montaigne's apparent fascination for excessive *dépense* and his concern for the sustainability of said *dépense* still cannot fail to appear contradictory. This contradiction, seemingly illogical, distinctly resonates with Georges Bataille's modern theorization of the notion of expenditure, namely in "La notion de dépense" and *La Part maudite*, insofar as it goes against the grain of the usual moral of either economy or ecology – as previously demonstrated, Bataille's general economy is in fact an ecology.³⁶³ It is therefore important to at least consider a comparison between Bataille and the Montaigne of "Des coches," because both of their arguments are intrinsically related to the conceptualization of waste as expenditure, itself the result of an anxiety for devastation. For Bataille, human activity is divided in two parts: one that is concerned with the "minimum nécessaire," [the minimum necessary] and the other a series of "dépenses improductives," [improductive spending] which he calls simply *dépense*. Hence, in the very first lines of "La notion de dépense," Bataille denounces "l'insuffisance du principe de l'utilité classique."³⁶⁴ Similarly, Montaigne affirms the principle of utility, together with that of durability and fairness, yet almost immediately questions its sufficiency. In various ways, in "Des coches," Montaigne reveals an intuition of a Bataillean *dépense*, in which it is necessary for part of the general *dépense* to be "dépenses improductives." Thus, Montaigne prefigures the relative insufficiency of the notion of sustainability before it even is defined: not all of humanity can sacrifice pleasure and beauty – waste in the way that is defined in this project – for the sake of utilitarianism and durability.

³⁶³ Bataille, Georges, *La Part maudite*. See the Introduction for a justification of Bataille's coherence within the project.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 21.

The notion of “bastiments sumptueux” contrasts and complicates the utilitarianism of the other elements of the list. Montaigne’s thought on the matter is ambivalent at best, and undeniably paradoxical. With this notion, especially bringing to light the etymology of “sumptueux,” the text refers to pure consumption, in the same way that sumptuary laws strove to control luxury consumption since Ancient Rome. Because Montaigne does not specify what these buildings would be used for, the reader must assume that their only valuable quality is that of being sumptuous. They seem, in his argument, to be of a no less durable, useful and fair expense than the rest. A key aspect of magnificence, as Daniel Ménager has explained, is the durability of monuments, since it is meant to impose the splendor of a ruler for many centuries to come³⁶⁵. A few lines below, Montaigne exposes the advice that Isocrates gave to his king: “Qu’il soit splendide en meubles et utensiles : d’autant que c’est une *despence de durée*, qui passe jusques à ses successeurs [...]” [“since that is a lasting investment which passes on to his successors”]³⁶⁶ Therefore, it seems that when durability and usefulness meet splendor of execution, *dépense* is indeed justified. It is however not the case in “Des coches.”

Indeed, Montaigne’s appreciation for the Pont Neuf appears to be blatantly more aesthetic and pleasure-inducing than purely utilitarian: “La fortune m’a faict grand desplaisir d’interrompre la belle structure du Pont neuf, de nostre grand’ ville, et m’oster l’esperoir avant mourir d’en veoir en train le service.” [“Fortune has given me great displeasure by interrupting the construction of the handsome new bridge of our great city, and depriving me of the hope of seeing it in full use before I die.”]³⁶⁷ He does focus on

³⁶⁵ Ménager, Daniel, ‘Montaigne et la magnificence,’ *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, vol. 29-32 (1992), pp 63-71.

³⁶⁶ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 902; 835. My emphasis.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 902; 835-6.

the “service” provided by this bridge, but the terms otherwise used are that of “desplaisir” and “belle structure,” demonstrating that aesthetic pleasure is indeed involved. If it were not to be so, his “bastiments sumptueux” could amount to the modern notion of “grands travaux” or major public works, since he cites the Pope, Gregoire XIII, and queen Catherine de Médicis, well-known for their intense politics of infrastructure. This example, however, is tainted with the contrasting ideas of utility and excess, with the immediately following sentence expressing an even more negative idea: “Outre ce, il semble aux subjects spectateurs de ces triomphes, qu’on leur fait montre de leurs propres richesses, et qu’on les festoye à leurs despens.”³⁶⁸ The notion of “triomphe” once more directs the text towards Ancient Rome, conjuring up military victory – that is to say, recalling the “coches guerriers” that Montaigne left above – and the later topic of circuses. The word “triomphe” straddles the victory itself and the public display of said victory, in the triumphal entry of the victor – which could in fact be traced back to “Des Cannibales,” concluding on King Charles IX’s triumphal entry into Rouen, the occasion that leads Montaigne to encounter the three natives of Brazil. In Montaigne’s reflection on the necessity and utility of various sorts of public spending, a military, political *dépense* would thus appear to be justified, or justifiable.

In “Des Cannibales,” moreover, Montaigne described the entry thus: “[...] on leur fit voir nostre façon, nostre pompe, la forme d’une belle ville [...]” [“they were shown our ways, our splendor, the aspect of a fine city.”]³⁶⁹ Beauty was given importance, and

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 902-3.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 213; 193. In a footnote to the Pléiade edition, Mireille Huchon explains that Montaigne hereby mixes up two events, the triumphal entry of Charles IX into Rouen during the first religious war, around september 1562, during which there were no natives present, and the “véritable rencontre” in April 1565, during Charles IX’s entry in Bordeaux, where twelve

the word “pompe” is also repeated in “Des coches,” signifying, precisely, “cérémonial somptueux, déploiement de faste, de luxe.”³⁷⁰ It surfaces at the very first anecdote of a non-military coach, that of Heliogabalus who attaches tigers, stags, dogs and women to his coach, “se faisant traîner par elles, en pompe, tout nud.” [“having himself, stark naked too, drawn by them in pomp”]³⁷¹ Towards the end of the essay, “pompe” becomes theoretically linked to the notion of magnificence, in a sentence where Montaigne explicitly declares it to be his main topic: “Quant à la pompe et magnificence, par où je suis entré en ce propos, ny Graece, ny Romme, ny Aegypte ne peut, soit en utilité, ou difficulté, ou noblesse, comparer aucun de ses ouvrages au chemin qui se voit au Peru [...]” [“As for pomp and magnificence, whereby I entered upon this subject, neither Greece nor Rome nor Egypt can compare any of its works, whether in utility or difficulty or nobility, with the road which is seen in Peru”]³⁷² Although it is clear that Montaigne demonstrates a care for wastefulness, he does not establish clear guidelines that could qualify him as a sort of early modern ecologist before the time of ecology. Instead, he raises the question of waste in all its implications, the difference between destructive wastefulness and necessary surplus remaining an inherently fluid, moveable notion. He therefore prefigures the insufficiency of a notion of ecology that is founded on conservation and austerity, the very notion that Stoekl, with Bataille, denounces as unfit to truly understand the problem of sustainability. In his review of *Bataille’s Peak*,

barbaric nations were present, including the representatives of the three Indian tribes of Brazil. See footnote, 1428.

³⁷⁰ *Trésor de la Langue Française*.

³⁷¹ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 902; 836.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 914; 848.

“Sustainability is not a Humanism,” Cameron Tonkinwise chooses a telling epigraph from Peter Van Wyck’s *Signs of Danger*:

The challenge of the real of ecological threats is precisely to discover a mediator that will allow something new to be said, that will perhaps allow a qualitatively new manner of thought and action to inform a time (ours for example) in which the productive capacity of threats seem to outstrip any reasonable capacity for reflective (affective) response.³⁷³

In a way, this mediator that Tonkinwise claims Bataille to be is a valuable lens through which to look at Montaigne’s stance in “Des coches.”

Bataille’s Share in Montaigne’s dépense

Bataille separates his “notion de dépense” in two parts, or share, the first representing “l’usage du minimum nécessaire, pour les individus d’une société donnée, à la conservation de la vie et à la continuation de l’activité productive,” and the second, which constitutes *la part maudite* from the title, represents improductive spending, “les dépenses improductives.” In his list of examples, Bataille’s definition of the accursed share aligns surprisingly well with nearly all the topics Montaigne covers in the chapter “Des coches,” allowing this claim to appear less anachronistic:

le luxe, les deuils, les guerres, les cultes, les constructions de monuments somptuaires, les jeux, les spectacles, les arts, l’activité sexuelle perverse (c’est-à-dire détournée de la finalité génitale) représentent autant d’activités qui, tout au moins dans les conditions primitives, ont leur fin en elles-mêmes.

[luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality) – all these represent activities which, at least in primitive circumstances, have no end beyond themselves.]³⁷⁴

³⁷³ Cameron Tonkinwise (2009) “Sustainability is not a Humanism: Review Essay on Allan Stoekl’s Bataille’s Peak,” *Design Philosophy Papers*, 7:1, 39-48.

³⁷⁴ Bataille, *La Part maudite*, 24. The citation is from “La notion de dépense”, therefore the English translation will come from *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, ed. Allan

Curiously, in a chapter where Montaigne attempts to establish that “Toute magistrature, comme tout art, jette sa fin hors d’elle,” he strings together various topics that Bataille deems, precisely, to have no end beyond themselves.

Let us analyse more closely the elements of the list, and their presence in “Des coches.” Once non-reproductive sex is left aside, Bataille’s list accurately describes Montaigne’s train of thought.³⁷⁵ In terms of war, the first coaches of the chapter are “ces coches guerriers,” quickly leading to luxury with the turn to “despences excessives.”³⁷⁶ Sumptuary monuments, discussed above, resurface in mourning, when the death of the king of Peru is narrated thus: “Et puis, pour endormir les peuples estonnez et transis de chose si estrange, on contrefit un grand deuil de sa mort, et luy ordonna on des *somptueuses funerailles*.” [“And then, to lull the people, stunned and dazed by such a strange thing, they counterfeited great mourning over his death and ordered a sumptuous funeral for him.”]³⁷⁷ The category of mourning is thus even tainted with “*somptueuses*,” recalling the earlier “sumptuaires,” and the more general theme of *dépense*. In order to represent Pizarro and other Spanish conquistadors, while the English translation displays the active, plural “they,” Montaigne merely chooses the subject “on,” a neutral and imprecise, almost universal pronoun, perhaps to represent the European colonial usurper.³⁷⁸

Stoekl, translated by Allan Stoekl, Carl R. Lovitt, and Donald M. Leslie Jr., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, 118.

³⁷⁵ This is not because it is not a topic in the *Essais*, since it very much is; but it is merely absent from “Des coches.”

³⁷⁶ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 902.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 912; 845.

³⁷⁸ I owe this thought to a suggestion by Jeff Persels.

Art is also a topic, in the sense of ornament, when Montaigne distinguishes European and American civilizations by their use of gold: indigenous kings use gold “pour faire ce grand monceau de vases et statues, à l’ornement de leur palais, et de leurs temples : au lieu que nostre or est tout en emploite et en commerce.” [“to make that great heap of vases and statues for the adornment of their palaces and their temples; whereas our gold is all in circulation and in trade.”]³⁷⁹ This is another instance in which Montaigne’s utilitarianism is ambivalent: having previously established that commerce is a derogatory notion in these chapters, and since “emploite” implies utilization or usage, the Europeans’s use of gold is tainted by the same vulgarity. On the other hand, the use of gold as ornament is idealized and admired. The notion of *dépense* is at risk also, since the object of admiration is the hoarding of said gold, its being prevented from circulation (“emploite et commerce”): “leur or se trouva tout assemblé, n’estant en autre service, que de montre, et de parade, comme un meuble réservé de pere en fils [...]” [“their gold was found all collected together, being of no other use than for show and parade, like a chattel preserved from father to son”] Crucially, “montre” and “parade” seem to have a positive connotation here, whereas they were deplored in the first half of the chapter as a useless *dépense*, and a poor use of the king’s power. Moreover, an earlier anecdotal advice from Isocrates, the reader will recall, prompted a king to be “splendide en meubles et utensiles: d’autant que c’est une despense de durée, qui passe jusques à ses successeurs.” Therefore, while utilitarianism is put into question later in the rest of the chapter, it is the notion of durability that still remains foregrounded, and as such, constitutes a great part of

³⁷⁹ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 913; 847.

Montaigne's early concern for sustainability or *développement durable*, in its French translation.

Hoarding Gold

The previous passage is also crucial for the argument the essay makes about the resources of the New World. Once more, continuing on the topic of gold, artificiality is deplored: “Nous le menuisons et alterons en mille formes, l’espandons et dispersons.” [“We cut it up small and change it into a thousand forms; we scatter and disperse it.”] The reader, moreover, will recall the prior praise of “espandre” in the “verset du laboureur ancien”: “Il faut espandre le grain, non pas le respandre.” [“he must scatter the seed, not spill it.”]³⁸⁰ It thus seems like the chapter, calling for moderation earlier – that is the distinction between “espandre” and “respandre” – progressively turns to a more resolute notion, that of hoarding, as it nears the end. Does it refuse *dépense* in order to advocate for hoarding resources? The notion is still paradoxical, since the praise of ornament and hoarding begins with the indigenous kings emptying out their own resources: indeed, they “espuisioient tousjours leurs mines” in the process. *Epuiser* is an important aspect of *dépense* in “Des coches”: it comes up early on to add to the notion that excess is self-proliferating in governance: “Les subjects d’un prince excessif en dons se rendent excessifs en demandes; [...] parquoy plus un Prince s’espuise en donnant, plus il s’apouvrit d’amys.” [“The subjects of a prince who is excessive in gifts become excessive in requests; [...] Wherefore the more a prince exhausts himself in giving, the poorer he makes himself in friends.”]³⁸¹ In this quote, the prince’s body is exhausted by the same process as his purse. In the later occurrence of the verb, “espuisioient tousjours leurs

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 903; 837.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 904; 837.

mines,” it evokes the limitedness of the resources, which the Kings of the New World seem to not care for. Has *dépense* somewhat reached a climax, as much as an impasse, in the wastefulness of the New World?

In fact, the “verset du laboureur ancien” does constitute an analogy with the topic of moderation in the *dépense* of kings: “Si la liberalité d’un Prince est sans discretion et sans mesure, je l’ayme mieux avare.” [“If the liberality of a prince is without discretion and without measure, I would rather he were a miser.”] ³⁸² Montaigne then deplores the kings’s “immodérée largesse.” In the following anecdote of Cyrus and Cresus, Montaigne opposes the “largesse” to the “thresor,” that is to say, the excessive *dépense* and the hoarded money or gold. The hoard is indeed a direct translation of the idea of treasure, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as: “An accumulation or collection of anything valuable hidden away or laid by for preservation or future use; a stock, store, esp. of money; a treasure.” Yet the anecdote puts into question the productivity of *largesse*, compared to that of *thrésor*. The anecdote is a battle between Cresus the hoarder and saver, and Cyrus, the generous spender. While Cresus likes to keep his money in coffers, in “espargne,” Cyrus, very liberal with his money, distributes large sums to “les grands de son estat.” He then proves to Cresus that, once he asks for their generosity in return, they return the original amount, and a surplus: “chacun de ses amys, n’estimant pas que ce fust assez faire, de luy en offrir seulement autant qu’il en avoit receu de sa munificence, y en meslant du sien propre beaucoup, il se trouva, que cette somme se montoit bien plus que ne disoit l’espargne de Cresus.” [“since each of his friends, thinking it was not enough to offer him merely as much as he had received from his munificence, added much that was

³⁸² Ibid., 904; 837.

more properly his own, it turned out that the total amounted to much more than the savings estimated by Croesus.”]³⁸³ One could wonder who is the real figure of moderation in such an anecdote; is it the too-liberal Cyrus who ends up having rightfully spent his money, or Cresus, who behaved like a miser and finishes the anecdote with less money saved than Cyrus. The text thus advocates for a useful spending that is also, paradoxically, profligate and superfluous. Again, the notion is very close to Bataille’s *dépense*, where, for instance, it is necessary to assign to the concept of utility a relative value.³⁸⁴ Against the extreme vice of avarice, for both Montaigne and Bataille, the perfect mean is not necessarily modest spending, but sometimes, in fact, a justified excessive spending.

Excusing Excess: “la superfluité de leurs jeux”

It is through this discussion that Montaigne arrives to the central representation of the Roman circus, as another form of luxury:

Les Empereurs tiroient excuse à *la superfluité de leurs jeux et montres publiques*, de ce que leur autorité dependoit aucunement (aumoins par apparence) de la volonté du peuple Romain: lequel avoit de tout temps accoustumé d’estre flaté par telle sorte de spectacles et d’excez.

[The emperors derived an excuse for the superfluity of their public games and spectacles from the fact that their authority depended somewhat (at least in appearance) on the will of the Roman people, who from time immemorial had been accustomed to being flattered by that sort of spectacle and extravagance.]³⁸⁵

³⁸³ Ibid., 904; 838.

³⁸⁴ Bataille, *La Part maudite*, 38. “Si l’on représente d’autre part l’intérêt, coïncidant avec celui de la gloire (comme avec celui de la déchéance), que la collectivité humaine lie nécessairement au changement qualitatif réalisé avec constance par le mouvement de l’histoire, si l’on se représente enfin que ce mouvement est impossible à contenir ou à diriger vers un but limité, il devient possible, toute réserve abandonnée, d’assigner à l’utilité une valeur *relative*.”

³⁸⁵ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 905; 838. My emphasis

Immediately placed in the realm of superfluity and excess, of spectacle and appearances, the circus is the last stop of Montaigne's journey before before the New World. There, he exposes another form of expenditure, which defines his own notion of *dépense* more clearly than before. In the detailed description of the arena, Montaigne shows an awareness that the circus, because it is superfluous spending, with all its extravagance and "tyssus d'or,"³⁸⁶ is reproachable under a criticism of excess, and yet, he begins his description thus: "C'estoit pourtant une belle chose [...]" ["It was, however, a fine thing [...]]"³⁸⁷ The "pourtant" seems to be armed against potential criticism. Unlike the Pont Neuf above, and the Inca road system that he praises at the end of the chapter, the aesthetic appreciation and the pleasure induced by the circus cannot claim any utility in terms of infrastructure – it is merely a question of authority, as explained in the previous quote. Yet Montaigne, in the following paragraphs, does not spend any more lines discussing the political utility of the circus, and instead, praises the ingenuity of its machinery. At the end of his description, he writes: "S'il y a quelque chose qui soit excusable en tels excez, c'est où l'invention et la nouveauté fournit d'admiration, non pas la despence." ["If there is anything excusable in such extravagances, it is when the inventiveness and the novelty of them, not the expense, provide amazement."]³⁸⁸ In the depth of his fascination for magnificent buildings and infrastructure, which he will preserve in his description of Mexico and Peru, Montaigne seems to admit that part of his argument in the chapter is indeed to find excuses for excess – or to determine whether it is excusable at all. In fact, the earlier mention of "despences excessives" was immediately

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 907.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 905; 838.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 907; 840.

followed by the concern for excuses: “Ce seroit chose excusable en pays estranger.” [“It would be excusable in a foreign country.”]³⁸⁹ That a chapter on the conquest of the New World actually has all the indicators of being a case-study on excess through the ages is indeed very telling. It is in this way that Bataille, precisely when he writes about the Aztecs and other primitive societies, in *La Part maudite*, advances a play on words, or perhaps merely a rehabilitation of the etymology of the word ‘consumption,’ calling these societies “société de consommation.”³⁹⁰ More than a modern ‘consumption,’ the devastation of the Americas of “des coches” is a consumption, upholding the sacrificial dimension of their society, while being themselves consumed by the Europeans.

The point of the circus: the framed environment

Jeux and spectacles, which Bataille also juxtaposes in his list, constitute the turning point of the *essai*, the transition through which the text merges the discussion of excess into that of the New World, with the lengthy description of the Roman circus, joining together the idea of game and that of spectacle. And in this transition, the environmental thread resurfaces. The thread-like points between “Des Cannibales” and “Des coches” converge in their desire to interrogate human mastery over nature, taking the essay back to Ancient Rome before the argument reaches the New World. There is, therefore, an admiration for the ingenuity of the circus – that is to say, for the contrast between artifice and nature:

C’etoit pourtant une belle chose, d’aller faire apporter et planter en la place aux arenes, une grande quantité de gros arbres, tous branchus et tous verts, representans une grande forest ombrageuse, despartie en belle symmetrie [...].

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 902; 835.

³⁹⁰ Bataille, *La Part maudite*, 69.

[It was, however, a fine thing to bring and plant in the amphitheater a great quantity of big trees, all branching and green, representing a great shady forest, arranged in beautiful symmetry [...]]³⁹¹

What is represented in the circus, then, is not the mere sand surface where gladiators would fight, but the framing the circus provides for an artificial landscape, and the testimony to humanity's mastery over nature. Inside of a building made of stone, the capacity to recreate "une grande forest ombrageuse," that is to say, the experience of a natural environment, amounts to a human achievement, yet precisely, the strings are visible – in French, when the subterfuge or trick is obvious, an idiom refers to the art of puppetry in order to signify that the illusion is broken.

Indeed, the text brings emphasis to the framing of this landscape, with the verb "representans": the trees represent a forest, just like the "mille austruches, mille cerfs, mille sangliers" of the first day provide the artificial experience of wilderness and hunting. For this, Montaigne uses, instead of the vocabulary of leisure, such as hunting, the verb referring to the spoliation of civilized landscapes, "les abandonnant à piller au peuple." They also, on the second day, stage the killing of even wilder animals: "le lendemain faire assommer en sa presence, cent gros lyons, cent leopards, et trois cens ours." ["on the next day to have a hundred big lions, a hundred leopards, and three hundred bears slaughtered in their presence"] The spectacle is that of a mastered, violated nature. The words of staging, of representation are important in that they betray the wild landscape as framed in the confines of the circus. In fact, the later description of the architecture and arrangements of the circus demonstrates that they converge on one goal; to protect the audience from the influence and impact of the actual, real environment

³⁹¹ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 905; 838-9.

outside the circus. On the one hand, all that can reach the audience is diffused nature: “ils faisoient eslaner des surgeons et filets d’eau, qui rejalloient contremont, et à cette hauteur infinie, alloient arroussant et embaumant cette infinie multitude.” [“At other times, from the floor of the place, they made spouts and jets of water spring forth which shot upward to an infinite height, then sprinkled and perfumed that infinite multitude.”]³⁹² The controlled landscape is in contact with the audience only to deliver pleasant refreshing water, and fragrance (“arroussant et embaumant”). On the other hand, the real environment outside of the frame is not allowed such contact: “Pour se couvrir de l’injure du temps, ils faisoient tendre cette immense capacité, tantost de voiles de pourpre labourez) l’éguille, tantost de soye [...]” [“To protect themselves against damage from the weather, they had that immense space hung with awnings, sometimes made of purple worked with the needle, sometimes of silk of one color or another [...]”] In the text, “temps” signifies the weather, be it too much sun, or rain. It is also an “injure,” so that the weather, but also the outside environment, is necessarily an offense inside of the circus. Crucially, the water from the artifice of the naumachia is pleasant to the audience, while rain seems not to be. In the middle of Montaigne’s second New World essay, therefore, the reader finds an illustration of the process through which nature separates from or turns into culture.

Naumachia and nausea

While it is immediately clear that Montaigne’s *jeux* and *spectacles* refer to the Roman circus, the fact that most of the description focuses on a naumachia – a naval battle recreated inside the circus – is significant, contrasted with the more notorious

³⁹² Ibid., 906; 840.

gladiators's games. As discussed above, the naumachia provides a framing of artificial nature that fits Montaigne's topic perfectly. Gladiator games evoke war and cruelty, that of humans on other humans – a connotation that is not dissonant with the rest of the essay– whereas the naumachia, although centered on a naval battle between humans, involves a compelling staging of nature. Moreover, if the boats of the naumachia Montaigne describes are to be considered a central transportation means in a chapter on transportation and coaches, it also refers to the means through which the conquest, colonization and ruin of the New World was able to happen. The analogy becomes even more potent as the description of a given naumachia unravels:

Et la place du fons, où les jeux se jouoyent, la faire premierement par art, entr'ouvrir et fendre en crevasses, representant des antres qui vomissoient les bestes destinées au spectacle : et puis secondement, l'inonder d'une mer profonde, qui charioit force monstres marins, chargée de vaisseaux armez à représenter une bataille navale : et tiercement, l'applanir et assécher de nouveau, pour le combat des gladiateurs.

[Also, first of all, to have the place at the bottom, where the games were played, open artificially and split into crevasses representing caverns that vomited forth the beasts destined for the spectacle; and then, second, to flood it with a deep sea, full of sea monsters and laden with armed vessels to represent a naval battle; and third, to level it and dry it off again for the combat of the gladiators [...].]³⁹³

Emphasizing the actuality of the metaphor, instead of the distant past of Ancient Rome, only two verbs are in the past tense, and they all belong to subordinate clauses, while the majority of the verbs is made to be transferable to the present, with infinitives such as “la faire [...] entr'ouvrir” and “l'applanir et assécher.” The redundancy of the phrase “les jeux se jouoyent,” the violence of “vomissaient les bestes,” because it undoubtedly recalls the vomiting sea of “Des Cannibales,” underscore the circus-like characteristics of the

³⁹³ Ibid., 906; 839.

New World. Significantly enough, the use of the verb *vomir* also evoke the nausea that Montaigne describes at the beginning of “Des coches.” Now at the center of his chapter, he depicts a deep sea with vessels and sea monsters, in the empty center of the arena, simultaneously referring back to the motion sickness of the beginning, and the great sea change of the sixteenth century: the advent of transatlantic commerce and the moral anxieties that go with exploiting the resources of the New World. Montaigne’s concerns for early consumerist behaviors and the environment therefore converge on the notion of circus, which prefigures the cruelty and wastefulness of the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru.

This is perhaps why the text metaphorically reaches the New World even earlier than the explicit declaration: “Nostre monde vient d’en trouver un autre.” [“Our world has just discovered another world [...]”]³⁹⁴ What the circus does, in some way, is to provide limits to a framed empty environment – “tous les costez de ce grand vuide” – in order for humans beings to give full expression to their appetite for spoliation and violence, demarcated inside of the circle-circus of the spectacle. That way, one may argue, there would be none of that energy left for destruction outside of the limits of the circus. In Bataille’s thought also, redistribution and repartition of energy plays a great part in the role of waste and expenditure in society. In *La Part maudite*, Bataille defines his theory further, declaring it to be the study of a movement: “Même ce qui peut être dit de l’art, de la littérature, de la poésie est en rapport au premier chef avec le mouvement que j’étudie : celui de l’énergie excédante, traduit dans l’effervescence de la vie.”³⁹⁵ The correlation between excess energy and its *dépense* into what he names the effervescence

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 908; 842.

³⁹⁵ Bataille, *La Part maudite*, 42.

of life is at the foundation of Bataille's thought, yet once compared with the ambivalence of excess in "Des coches," Montaigne's nausea seems to take on a new dimension. First, one that criticizes Europeans for rendering themselves excessive in their demands (the previously demonstrated self-proliferation of excess), for building needs that ended up driving them to conquer more land. Here, it is important to note that Montaigne, despite having read Las Casas or Gomara, does not focus so much on the missionary aspect of the colonization, but almost only on the commercial motivations. Second, one that could denounce colonization (and the subsequent ruin of the people and lands of the New World) as a wasteful consequence to the excess of contemporary European societies. Bataille once associated the surplus of industrial production with the need to burn it up (*consumer*) into the world wars in the early twentieth-century. He writes: "On nie parfois que le trop-plein de la production industrielle soit à l'origine des guerres récentes, en particulier de la première."³⁹⁶ Without drawing anachronistic parallels, there is a phenomenon in Renaissance France that essentially compares to the "trop-plein" of industrial production: it is precisely, in the analysis I develop, the "trop-plein" of luxury, but also the general expansion of excess and waste in the culture, literature and arts of Renaissance France, as they are studied by Terence Cave and Rebecca Zorach. Bataille's argument, moreover, relies heavily on the role of literature "en rapport au premier chef" with the theory of *dépense*, as the previous quote illustrated.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 52.

A Moderate Colonization

This could be deemed a superfluous extrapolation, and yet, towards the end of the chapter, Montaigne precisely deplores that the New World was not discovered by the *moderate* Ancient Greeks or Romans, instead of the violent, wasteful Europeans:

Que n'est tombée sous Alexandre, ou sous ces anciens Grecs et Romains, une si noble conquête : et une si grande mutation et alteration de tant d'empires et de peuples, sous des mains, qui eussent doucement poly et defriché ce qu'il y avoit de sauvage : et eussent conforté et promeu les bonnes semences, que nature y avoit produit : meslant non seulement à la culture des terres, et ornement des villes, les arts de deçà, en tant qu'elles y eussent esté nécessaires, mais aussi, meslant les vertus Grecques et Romaines, aux origineles du pays?

[Why did not such a noble conquest fall to Alexander or to those ancient Greek and Romans? Why did not such a great change and alteration of so many empires and peoples fall into hands that would have gently polished and cleared away whatever was barbarous in them, and would have strengthened and fostered the good seeds that nature had produced in them, not only adding to the cultivation of the earth and the adornment of cities the arts of our side of the ocean, in so far as they would have been necessary, but also adding the Greek and Roman virtues to those originally in that region?]³⁹⁷

This could partly justify the lengthy discussion of how to properly spend: perhaps what the text implies all along is how to properly, and with dignity, colonize a land. It involves, unsurprisingly, a sense of moderation, in a mixed assimilation of both cultures, of wilderness and technique, but, most importantly, a respectful, somewhat ecological relationship to the new land, expressed by “doucement” and “conforté et promeu.” He advocates for a reasoned colonization, where the virtues of both peoples are mixed, and a much less brutal approach to the conquest, “doucement poly et defriché.”³⁹⁸ The fact that

³⁹⁷ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 910; 843-4.

³⁹⁸ For more details on whether Montaigne misrepresents the realities of colonization in Ancient Rome, see studies on Romanization: Millet, M., 1990, “Romanization: historical issues and archaeological interpretation,” in Blagg, T. and Millett, M. (Eds.), *The Early Roman Empire in the West*, Oxford: Oxbow Books, pp. 35–44, and Webster, J., 2001, “Creolizing the Roman

Montaigne, in order to expose his view on the colonization of the New World, resorts to an analogy with agriculture, makes an environmental reading of “Des coches” even more striking. Of course, Montaigne does not really advocate for a reconsideration of the native seeds and plants into New World agriculture. Instead, he opposes the ruin and devastation of the native land to that of its native peoples, as if, rhetorically at least, the human and the nonhuman realms were intrinsically linked, perhaps via the moveable notion of “sauvage,” the flexibility of which he established in “Des Cannibales.”

Therefore, even in the depth of his criticism of the Spanish conquest, Montaigne merely suggests another way, without explicitly denouncing the acts of the Spaniards that he has read about in Las Casas.³⁹⁹ A well-known subject of contention in Montaigne studies, it is worth noting that a majority of voices indeed points at an influence, not only of Lopez de Gomara’s *Histoire générale des Indes* but also of Bartolomé de las Casas. In his study, Juan Duran Luzio effectively demonstrates that a reading of Gomara would be insufficient for Montaigne to develop such a derogatory opinion of the Spanish conquest: “El libro de Gómara no podría inspirar ni las críticas ni las denuncias que abundan en los *Essais*.” The true source of Montaigne for that, he argues, is the *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de los Indias*, de Bartolomé de las Casas: “es un libro que estaba popularizando por toda Europa la noción de un cosmos original destruido por la acción

Provinces,” *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol 105 No. 2, pp. 209–225. As far as it is possible to determine, it does seem like, while far from ideal, both historical and archeological sources suggest that the Romans’s approach to conquest was much less brutal, in the sense that they did not exterminate whole segments of the population.

³⁹⁹ For more details, see Juan Duran Luzio study, “Bartolomé de las Casas y Michel de Montaigne: Escritura y lectura del Nuevo Mundo” in the *Revista Chilena de Literatura*, n°37, 1991, 9. Frank Lestringant, in *Le Huguenot et le sauvage*, also cites in a footnote Géralde Nakam who precedes Luzio’s study, in *Montaigne et son temps: Les événements et les Essais. L’histoire, la vie, le livre* (Paris: Nizet, 1982) and *Les Essais de Montaigne: miroir et procès de leur temps. Témoignage historique et création littéraire*, (Paris: Nizet, 1984).

devastadora del invasor [...].” In fact, in his study, Luzio clearly differentiates Gomara and Las Casas in a way that goes to illustrate Montaigne’s environmental approach: “En vez de la colonización de las Indias, que es la tesis central de Gómara, Las Casas enfrenta al lector con la destrucción de un mundo natural, ética y socialmente justo.”⁴⁰⁰ Yet Montaigne’s role is not to repeat what Las Casas has denounced, but to reflect upon it. In this quote, the conditional only envisions what could have been a better process of civilization for the New World, and through this rhetorical device, Montaigne is able to imply much more than an explicit account of the devastation of the Indies would. The “lecteur bon nageur” is left to both deduce and imagine what the opposite of “doucement poly et defriché” and of “conforté et promeu les bonnes semences” could be. The neutrality of a phrase like “une si grande mutation et alteration de tant d’empires et de peuples” also resonates differently with the images previously conjured up in the chapter, those of circus, wastefulness, and nausea.

Vain ecology in the endtimes

Yet the neutrality does not last long, and after depicting, for contrast, such a moderate and admirable vision of colonization, the reader is soon left with the bitter, apocalyptic description of “cette mesme image du monde, qui coule pendant que nous y sommes.”⁴⁰¹ Even in the awareness of decadence that Montaigne expresses towards the end of the chapter, the images of submersion with water continue, the world sinking while we stand upon it. What was only suggested at the beginning, the derogatory dimension of commerce, is now explicit, once the spoliation of the New World and of its peoples is exposed:

⁴⁰⁰ Luzio, *op. cit.*, 10.

⁴⁰¹ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 908.

Qui mit jamais à tel prix, le service de la mercadence et de la trafique?
Tant de villes rasées, tant de nations exterminées, tant de millions de
peuples, passez au fil de l'espée, et la plus riche et belle partie du monde
bouleversée, pour la negotiation des perles et du poivre : Mechaniques
victoires.

[Who ever set the utility of commerce and trading at such a price? So
many cities razed, so many nations exterminated, so many millions of
people put to the sword, and the richest and most beautiful part of the
world turned upside down, for the traffic in pearls and pepper! Base and
mechanical victories!]⁴⁰²

The purpose of colonization in “Des coches” is mainly a commercial, economical one, and as such, provokes neither the fascination of a *dépense de durée* nor that of a useful one. All that is left are the luxurious, superfluous commodities that are generated by any colonization, such as pearls and pepper, words that are surely meant to contrast radically with the enormity of the consequences. It is not gold Montaigne chooses to highlight as the object of the Europeans’s greed in this particular moment, like Voltaire will in *Candide*’s “El Dorado,” but a minuscule and precious product of nature, like pearls, and a spice. None of the two refer merely to the New World. Indeed, the first lines of the quote significantly expand the scope of the essay both spatially and temporally beyond America, since “millions de peuples” refers to a larger scale disaster, while pearls and peppers could point at the Orient. Yet the last part of the sentence returns to the narrower scope of the New World, idealized again into “la plus riche et belle partie du monde.” The reader, suddenly, finds a more brutally explicit and redundant tone than at the beginning of the paragraph: “Jamais l’ambition, jamais les inimitiez publiques ne pousserent les hommes les uns contre les autres à si horribles hostilitiez et calamitez si

⁴⁰² Ibid., 910; 844.

miserables.” [“Never did ambition, never did public enmities, drive men against one another to such horrible hostilities and such miserable calamities.”]

Behind Montaigne’s critique of colonization, there appears to be the foundation of a more universal than local, more environmental than economic critique of the waste of resources, human and nonhuman, involved in societal progress in the early modern period. If indeed societies can decay as quickly and radically as the Roman empire and the Inca civilization, the feeling that results is one of wasted energy:

Comme vainement nous concluons aujourd’hui l’inclination et la decrepitude du monde par les arguments que nous tirons de nostre propre foiblesse et decadence [...]; ainsi vainement concluait cettuy-là [Lucretius] sa naissance et jeunesse, par la vigueur qu’il voyoit aux esprits de son temps, abondans en nouveleitez et inventions de divers arts.

[As vainly as we today infer the decline and decrepitude of the world from the arguments we draw from our own weakness and decay [...] so vainly did this poet infer the world’s birth and youth from the vigor he saw in the minds of his time, abounding in novelties and inventions in various arts.]⁴⁰³

This thought of vanity is provoked by a consideration of a quote by Lucretius. A word appears at that moment of the essay, and will only gain in importance from then on: *vainement*, the same *vanité* that will title two of Montaigne’s other essays.⁴⁰⁴ This is where Bataille’s *Accursed Share* converges with the essay once more, since he too focuses on the importance of vanity. For him, vanity is a key term of the accursed share.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 908; 841.

⁴⁰⁴ In the first book, “De la vanité des paroles”, in the third “De la vanité”, and even “Des vaines subtilitez” in the first book.

He advocates for the “vain gaspillage des profits.”⁴⁰⁵ Yet, if the *dépense improductive* is vain, is it also wasted? Or is this waste somehow meaningful, maybe even necessary?

Veering towards vanity

There is a redundancy to vanity, and it is that of the Roman circus, always filling itself with artifice and emptying itself out again. Montaigne described it as follows: “Tous les costez de ce grand vuide remplis et *environnez* depuis le fons jusques au comble, de soixante ou quatre vingts rangs d’echelons, aussi de marbre couvers de carreaux [...]” [all the sides of this vast emptiness filled and surrounded from top to bottom with sixty or eighty rows of seats, also made of marble, covered with cushions].⁴⁰⁶ That the emptiness (the French “vuide” signifying a space) is buildable, fillable with such a long list of object demonstrates the crucial poetics of compensation in the chapter. Juxtaposed to “remplis,” the reader finds the verb “environnez.” Karen Pinkus traces its etymology in “The Risks of Sustainability” to the root verb “virer,” a maritime term, signifying a turn, a change.⁴⁰⁷ In fact, as Pinkus argues, the Latin root of veering leads to vibrating, thus recalling Montaigne’s shaky seat, and the crumbling shores of Medoc. The core relationship between Montaigne’s shaky seat and the earthquake that the discovery and subsequent conquest and ruin of the New World represent could be highlighted in the lexical familiarity between the verbs “souffrir” and “remuer,” together with the noun

⁴⁰⁵ Bataille, *La Part maudite*, 50. Robert Hurley, in his translation of *The Accursed Share*, New York : Zone Books, 1988, translates it as ‘the squandering of profits’ (22), but the adjective ‘vain’ is lost in translation.

⁴⁰⁶ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 905. My translation.

⁴⁰⁷ Karen Pinkus, ‘The Risks of Sustainability,’ in *Criticism, Crisis, and Contemporary Narrative. Textual Horizons in an Age of Global Risk*, ed. Paul Crosthwaite. London: Routledge, 2011, pp. 62-80.

“siege,” essential to the starting travel sickness, that resurface at another key moment

closer to the end of the chapter, effectively weaving the thread:

L'autre, Roy de Mexico, ayant long temps defendu sa ville *assiégée* et montré en ce *siege* tout ce que peut et la *souffrance* et la perseverance, si onques prince et peuple le montra, et son malheur l'ayant rendu vit entre les mains des ennemis, avec capitulation d'estre traité en Roy (aussi ne leur fit-il rien voir, en la prison indigne de ce tiltre) ; ne trouvant point apres cette victoire tout l'or qu'ils s'estoient promis, apres avoir tout *remué* et tout fouillé [...].

[The other one, the king of Mexico, had long defended his besieged city and shown in this siege all that endurance and perseverance can do, if ever prince and people did so, when his bad fortune put him in his enemies' hands alive, on their promise that they would treat him as a king; nor did he in his captivity show anything unworthy of this title. After this victory, his enemies, not finding all the gold they had promised themselves, first ransacked and searched everything [...]]⁴⁰⁸

This prompts several questions: insofar as human beings are surrounded by the environment, are we indeed all on a shaky seat? What if the role of the human in the environment had to do with movement? Montaigne's vision of the endtimes, in the Renaissance, is expressed through the sudden immobility of a chapter that was based on motion, travel and transportation: “L'univers tombera en paralysie: l'un membre sera perclus, l'autre en vigueur.” [“The universe will fall into paralysis; one member will be crippled, the other in full vigor.”]⁴⁰⁹ In another poetics of compensation, when Europe will descend into ruin, “cet autre monde ne fera qu'entrer en lumiere.” [“the other world will only be coming into the light when ours is leaving it”] This movement, a human one in a nonhuman environment, would then produce nausea but its property would be to

⁴⁰⁸ Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 912; 846.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 909; 842.

endure. It would pain to find its utility, but persevere nonetheless. As Montaigne writes, still in “Des coches,” using the root “virer” once more in the context of vanity:

Nous n’allons point, nous rodons plustost, et nous tournevrons çà et là : nous nous promenons sur nos pas. Je crains que nostre cognoissance soit foible en tous sens. Nous ne voyons ny gueres loin, ny guere arriere. Elle embrasse peu et vit peu : courte et en estandue de temps, et en estandue de matiere.

[We do not go in a straight line; we rather ramble, and turn this way and that. We retrace our steps. I fear that our knowledge is weak in every direction; we do not see very far ahead or very far behind. It embraces little and has a short life, short in both extent of time and extent of matter.]⁴¹⁰

The rambling and errancy of this quote expresses the vanity of human endeavors at the end of “Des coches.” The ending is apocalyptic, with Montaigne relating that in the kingdom of Mexico, indigenous people also thought the universe to be coming to an end. The text then lists the narratives of the five ages of the suns, where each of them perished by a natural disaster: the first by “universelle inondation d’eaux,” the second by “la cheute du ciel sur nous,” the third by fire, the fourth by “une émotion d’air, et de vent,” after which the humans were created. This constitutes the creation myth of the Aztec people. Instead, it is implied, their end came from human actions, and artifice, because the “mechaniques victoires” means “vile victories”⁴¹¹ but also, crucially, recalls the “toute cette machine” a few lines above, which refers, in context, to colonization as a whole. Instead of fearing natural disasters, therefore, perhaps Montaigne’s contemporaries should fear human appetites and violence, a list of which is given earlier on, between the mention of Alexander the Great and that of pearls and peppers: “Au rebours, nous nous sommes servis de leur ignorance et inexperience à les plier plus

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 907; 840.

⁴¹¹ Cotgrave dictionary gives as translations for the French “mecanique”: “base, meane, ordinarie, vile.”

facilement vers la trahison, *luxure*, *avarice* et vers toute sorte d'inhumanité et de cruauté, à l'exemple et patron de nos meurs." ["On the contrary, we took advantage of their ignorance and inexperience to incline them the more easily toward treachery, lewdness, avarice, and every sort of inhumanity and cruelty, after the example and pattern of our ways."]⁴¹² It is also worth noting that, if the text seems to point at the Spanish conquest, Montaigne makes it into a universal, human guilt with the adoption of the possessive "nos" at this point in the crucial paragraph of the "Mécaniques victoires." All ends in submersion, since Atahualpa himself is thrown to the ground with metaphor of consumption: "de façon qu'on ne le peut oncques abbatre, quelque meurtre qu'on fist de ces gens là, jusques à ce qu'un homme de cheval l'alla saisir au corps, et *l'avalla par terre*." ["so that they never could bring him down, however great a slaughter they made of those people, until a horseman seized him around the body and pulled him to the ground."]⁴¹³ Atahualpa appears to be swallowed up by the ground, another *engloutissement*, like the Athenians in "Des Cannibales," and the ground has been established as an uneven, unstable surface. Thus, is not even Montaigne's conception of an ecological relationship to colonization somehow vain?

If Bataille offers a post-sustainable alternative to modern ecological discourses, as Allan Stoekl argues, then Montaigne could provide a pre-sustainable one, in the sense that sustainability is not yet defined, but very much present under various concerns that are visible in "Des Cannibales" and "Des coches." How curious, therefore, that his early awareness of sustainability is at least as ambivalent and problematic as Bataille's post-

⁴¹² Montaigne, *op. cit.*, 910; 844. My emphasis.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 914; 849. A more accurate translation would finish with "and swallowed him up into the ground".

sustainable one. They both advocate for a detailed but ambivalent form of wastefulness, involving games, leisure, unproductive spending. They both predict endtimes that are not necessarily an end in themselves. In the middle of such a coincidence, however, Montaigne paves an ecology of moderation, a middle ground between commerce and ornament, between a concern for the utility and durability of things, and their sumptuous and sumptuary dimension. He asserts the usefulness of unproductive endeavors, and contests the – already – universal necessity of commerce, the desire for excess. If Montaigne can be read as an early modern ecologist, he is a contradictory one, which makes him even more compelling.

Afterword: An Ecology of Waste or a Vain Ecology?

The aim of the dissertation was to expose and dissect an ecology of waste in the literature of Renaissance France, insofar as, in the texts, the human inhabitation of nonhuman surroundings, that is to say, the mastering of nature, is very much suspended, as the object of a shift. The ecology of waste is what I call the difficult balance between plenitude and scarcity, the compensatory force at play *between* these two poles. It is an ecology insofar as it speaks of human beings striving to inhabit and settle onto a land, while faced with the limitedness of resources and the length and duration of human history. Most importantly, it is about tracing the textual effects of these movements and desires that tip moderation into excess to understand better how they come to exist.

A few years ago, in 2011, in the program distributed to the audience of Krzysztof Warlikowski's "Un Tramway," an adaptation of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the only explanation given for Isabelle Huppert playing Blanche in the setting of a bowling room, among other notable deviations, was a long extract from Jean Baudrillard's *Amérique*. One paragraph, after which the piece is titled in the program, "Après l'orgie," provides an uncanny coda for this discussion of a transatlantic excess:⁴¹⁴

Sur les collines parfumées de Santa Barbara, toutes les villas sont comme des *funeral homes*. Entre les gardénias et les eucalyptus, dans la profusion des espèces végétales et la monotonie de l'espèce humaine, c'est le destin funeste de l'utopie réalisée. Au cœur de la richesse et de la libération : "What are you doing after the orgy?" Que faire quand tout est disponible, le sexe, les fleurs, les stéréotypes de la vie et de la mort? C'est le problème de l'Amérique et, à travers elle, c'est devenu celui du monde entier.

[On the aromatic hillsides of Santa Barbara, the villas are all like funeral homes. Between the gardenias and the eucalyptus trees, among the profusion of plant genres [sic] and the monotony of the human species, lies the tragedy of a utopian dream made reality. In the very heartland of wealth and liberation, you always

⁴¹⁴ The miracle of the internet has made this programme, probably thrown away when I moved to Ithaca, available at this address: http://www.theatre-odeon.eu/sites/default/files/pj/bible_tramway.pdf, accessed 4/1/2017.

hear the same question: ‘What are you doing after the orgy?’ What do you do when everything is available – sex, flowers, the stereotypes of life and death? This is America’s problem and, through America, it had become the whole world’s problem.]⁴¹⁵

Granted, none of the texts in my corpus really talk about orgies, and neither was sixteenth-century America a land of wealth and liberation exactly. The key concepts, however, are not anachronistic. For there are dimensions of orgy that are pertinent to an Early Modern thinking of the ecology of waste: what is an orgy, in all its seeking of pleasure above all, its lack of control, its sensual pursuit of decadence, if not the wild expenditure of resources depicted in Rabelais, or the depravation and devastation of Montaigne’s essays? For the director of “Un Tramway,” orgy clearly evokes the aimless energy and, ultimately, perhaps also the waste of his main characters. In my readings, Rabelais and Montaigne also wonder what happens after the orgy.

An orgy starts, after all, with an excessive appetite, something that both Rabelais and Montaigne represent in their texts. It is uncanny, then, that Santa Barbara and its man-made gardens evoke the same aromatic, colorful “profusion d’espèces végétales” that were already characteristic of both Canada and Brazil in the early days of New World exploration. That America is a realized utopia could be a point of disagreement, but one cannot deny that, since its discovery, it has been associated with a potential utopia or paradise. *Témoins* Saguenay, Thélème, El Dorado, or the other world inside Pantagruel’s mouth.

The realized utopia that is Thélème already demonstrates that it could only ever be gratuitous and redundant, a movement that presides over much of the texts studied in

⁴¹⁵ The translation is Chris Turner’s, in Baudrillard, Jean, *America*, London, New York: Verso, 1994 (1988), 30.

this project. What to do, indeed, when everything becomes available? When there is a profusion of resources, how is it that they do not seem to result in a greater purpose, a greater security? Instead, the authors I study emphasize and arguably fear an even more vehement consumption. They delineate the visible, predictable lack of resources that they perceive in the future, and the lack of alternatives for managing waste differently, as in Panurge's *aultrement mesnagier*. There is, in both Montaigne and Rabelais, a progressive perception of excess that surmounts the fascination with waste: *excessive dépense* is a concern both for the 'late' Rabelais of the *Tiers Livre* and the 'late' Montaigne of "Des coches." Could it be that Montaigne, Rabelais, and the others were somehow wondering what would come after capitalism, before it even existed as such?

This is perhaps what Montaigne is getting at with his *tournevirons ça et là*, what Rabelais denounces when the prologue of *Gargantua* evokes the precious "deprisement incroyable de tout ce pourquoy les humains tant veiglent, courent, travaillent, naviguent et bataillent." Through disorientation and wasted movements, Rabelais and Montaigne portray the lack of direction for humanity in a vast, unsettling environment. Precisely, the movement of *orienter* and that of *environment* is similar, in that it is relative to one object: for orient, the sun, or the cardinal points, and for environment, the human being. The latter supposes a center, the former is more moveable, adaptable. None of the movements described above, Montaigne's *tournevirons* and Rabelais's enumeration of active verbs, have a defined direction. They are without complements, they imply nothing but the mere movement itself, the vain expenditure of energy. The very act of writing, fundamentally, partakes of the same movement. In this way too, they are caught up by Bataille: "Même ce qui peut être dit de l'art, de la

littérature, de la poésie est en rapport au premier chef avec le mouvement que j'étudie: celui de l'énergie excédante, traduit dans l'effervescence de la vie."⁴¹⁶

Ultimately, this Renaissance and French ecology of waste ponders the human impact on the environment – an early modern footprint of sorts – at the very same time that it emphasizes, more than ever, the vanity of human actions and movements. And they deplore this vanity as much as they relish it, since it is this very margin that allows them to create what is now recognized as the literature of Renaissance France, as quite separate from utilitarian scientific discourse of the period. Perhaps modern ecology is stuck in the same impasse between attempting to appear necessary while seeming futile. Let us then leave the last words to Montaigne: “C’est un vain estude, qui veut; mais qui veut aussi, c’est un estude de fruit inestimable.”⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ Bataille, *La Part maudite*, 42.

⁴¹⁷ Originally, Montaigne refers to the study of history, in “De l’éducation des enfans.”

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